



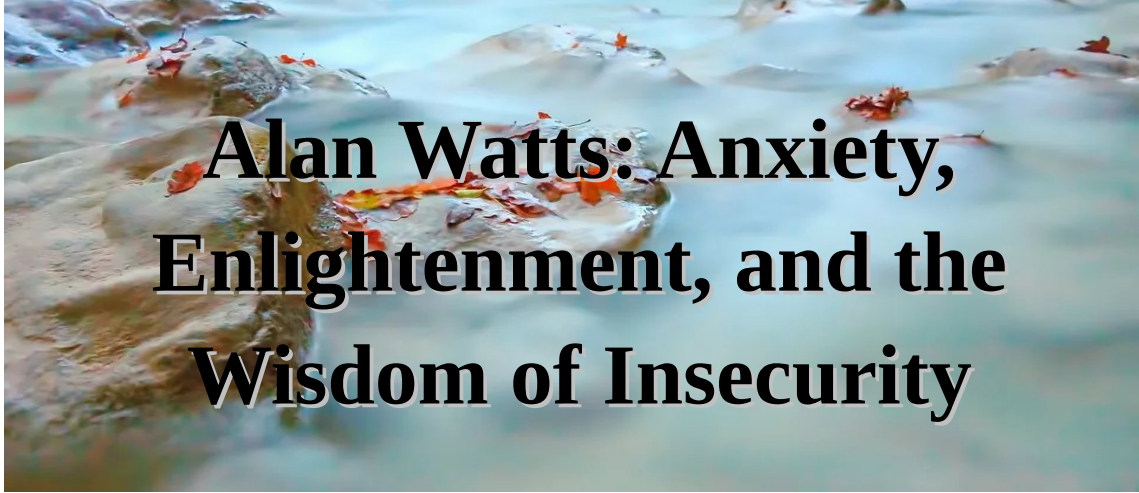
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Alan Watts: Anxiety, Enlightenment, and the Wisdom of Insecurity

Throughout the history of civilization individuals have had access to myths which conveyed the sense that life was meaningful and secure – that human beings have a central place in the universe, an importance in the grand scheme of things.

With the rise of science these myths have been penetrated and dissolved. Fewer and fewer individuals find it possible to believe in them, and thus more and more are left standing alone in the void, facing the abyss – forced to figure out the meaning of life and their place in the universe without any external support:

“There is, then, the feeling that we live in a time of unusual insecurity. In the past hundred years so many long-established traditions have broken down—traditions of family and social life, of government, of the economic order, and of religious belief. As the years go by, there seem to be fewer and fewer rocks to which we can hold, fewer things which we can regard as absolutely right and true, and fixed for all time.

To some this is a welcome release from the restraints of moral, social, and spiritual dogma. To others it is a dangerous and terrifying breach with reason and sanity, tending to plunge human life into hopeless chaos. To most, perhaps, the immediate sense of release has given a brief exhilaration, to be followed by the deepest anxiety. For if all is relative, if life is a torrent without form or goal in whose flood absolutely nothing save change itself can last, it seems to be something in which there is “no future” and thus no hope.” ([The Wisdom of Insecurity: A Message for an Age of Anxiety, Alan Watts](#))

Many have celebrated the destruction of religious and cultural myths, believing that we have now rid ourselves of “childish illusions”, and thus are free to confront reality without blinders. Others

thinkers, such as Watts, have understood that myths serve a vital role in maintaining the psychological and emotional health of individuals.

The Importance of Myths

As human beings we need myths to impart the sense that life is meaningful and worth the effort, that there is some coherent order or plan to it all – that life isn't merely a "tale told by an idiot".

"For man seems to be unable to live without myth, without the belief that the routine and drudgery, the pain and fear of this life have some meaning and goal in the future." [The Wisdom of Insecurity: A Message for an Age of Anxiety, Alan Watts](#)

Myths act as a psychological antidote to the reality of our situation: they mask our cosmic insignificance, make sense of otherwise seemingly senseless suffering and evil, and provide ideals to help us rise above difficult situations and continue prodding onwards. To live without myths is a burden which has been forced upon the modern individual.

With the destruction of traditional myths, many have proposed that modern humans need to adopt new myths – but Watts doesn't think this is possible. A myth is only effective so long as it is believed to be true. When it is seen for what it is, it loses its efficacy.

"Once there is the suspicion that a religion is a myth, its power has gone. It may be necessary for man to have a myth, but he cannot self-consciously prescribe one as he can mix a pill for a headache. A myth can only "work" when it is thought to be truth, and man cannot for long knowingly and intentionally "kid" himself." [The Wisdom of Insecurity: A Message for an Age of Anxiety, Alan Watts](#)

Distraction as a Coping Mechanism

The lack of adequate myths available to the modern individual has played a role in the rise of psychological issues such as depression and anxiety. It can be terrifying to face the mysterious unknown that is the universe without external aids. Unable to make sense of the universe and their place in it, many today flee from the existential angst this causes through distraction.

It's easier to fill one's mind with mindless entertainment, worrying about what the latest celebrity is doing or wearing, than to be left alone to face troubling existential questions such as: Why am I here? Who am I? Speaking of the individual who craves distraction, Watts wrote:

"His eyes flit without rest from television screen, to newspaper, to magazine, keeping him in a sort of orgasm-without-release through a series of teasing glimpses of shiny automobiles, shiny female bodies, and other sensuous surfaces, interspersed with such restorers of sensitivity—shock treatments—as "human interest" shots of criminals, mangled bodies, wrecked airplanes, prize fights, and burning buildings." [The Wisdom of Insecurity: A Message for an Age of Anxiety, Alan Watts](#)

Is Consciousness a "Mistake"?

For those of us who lift our eyes from the television screen and social media feeds, and actually contemplate the meaning of our existence and the universe around us, it may appear tempting to conclude that human beings are the product of an evolutionary "mistake". Perhaps our

consciousness is capable of grasping too much knowledge and insight, and without the soothing balm of illusions and myths, we are too weak to face the unknown:

“It is understandable that we should sometimes ask whether life has not gone too far in this direction, whether “the game is worth the candle,” and whether it might not be better to turn the course of evolution in the only other possible direction—backwards, to the relative peace of the animal, the vegetable, and the mineral.” [The Wisdom of Insecurity: A Message for an Age of Anxiety, Alan Watts](#)

“Letting Go” as Enlightenment

Watts considers this point, but he does not accept it. He proposes another solution to the problem – a total and comprehensive reorientation in our way of living via “letting go”. We can let go of our need to feel secure, of our desire for life to be meaningful and to make sense. We can “let go” of all our beliefs which keep us confined and chained to a certain limiting worldview. We can “let go” of our attachment to life and death. Doing so is not easy and requires a transformation of consciousness and attitude, but in the eyes of Watts the time is perfect for such a transformation.

“The present phase of human thought and history is especially ripe for this “letting go.” Our minds have been prepared for it by this very collapse of the beliefs in which we have sought security. From a point of view strictly, if strangely, in accord with certain religious traditions, this disappearance of the old rocks and absolutes is no calamity, but rather a blessing. It almost compels us to face reality with open minds.” [The Wisdom of Insecurity: A Message for an Age of Anxiety, Alan Watts](#)

“Letting go” is so difficult because we have an innate tendency to grasp onto things. Because we are aware that everything flows and what we have now will at some point in the future be taken from us, we try to turn the things we’re attached to into stone. We hold too tightly to our loved ones and relationships, we do anything we can to retain our youthfulness as we age, and we grasp onto our beliefs as if they foretold the secrets of the universe, and thus remain rigid and closed minded.

This attempt to grasp onto things doomed to fail – for the universe flows on incessantly and indifferently to our wishes. The attempt to grasp on to things, to make the impermanent permanent, therefore goes against the very nature of life itself. Life is always changing and in flux, and any attempt or desire to make it otherwise is futile and foolish:

“Indeed, this is the common attitude of man to so much that he loves. For the greater part of human activity is designed to make permanent those experiences and joys which are only lovable because they are changing. Music is a delight because of its rhythm and flow. Yet the moment you arrest the flow and prolong a note or chord beyond its time, the rhythm is destroyed. Because life is likewise a flowing process, change and death are its necessary parts. To work for their exclusion is to work against life.” [The Wisdom of Insecurity: A Message for an Age of Anxiety, Alan Watts](#)

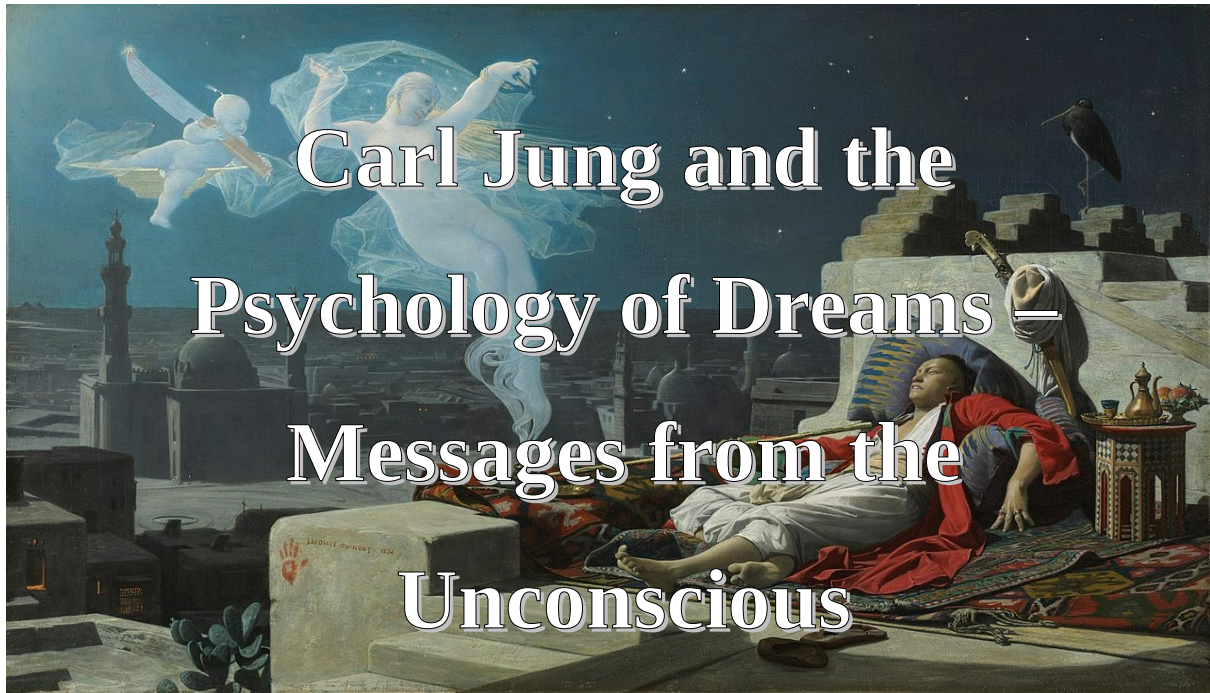
According to Watts the only option left for those of us in the modern day for whom all myths have lost their potency, and who are uncannily aware of the indifferent coldness of the universe which in due time will destroy everything we love including our life itself, is to accept our situation, jump into the universal river, and go along for the ride:

“The only way to make sense out of change is to plunge into it, move with it, and join the dance.”[*The Wisdom of Insecurity: A Message for an Age of Anxiety, Alan Watts*](#)



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Carl Jung and the Psychology of Dreams – Messages from the Unconscious

“We also live in our dreams, we do not live only by day. Sometimes we accomplish our greatest deeds in dreams.”

Carl Jung, The Red Book

Are dreams the product of random brain activity, or a side effect of the mind consolidating its memories? Are they, as Sigmund Freud suggested, the expression of repressed wishes and desires? Or is there something richer and more meaningful to dreams that escapes the notice of many in the modern day? Carl Jung believed there was, and in this video, we are going to explore why dreams are of vital importance to our mental and physical health and how the art of dream interpretation can revitalize our life.

“It is only in modern times that the dream, this fleeting and insignificant looking product of the psyche, has met with such profound contempt. Formerly it was esteemed as a harbinger of fate, a portent and comforter, a messenger of the gods. Now we see it as the emissary of the unconscious, whose task it is to reveal the secrets that are hidden from the conscious mind, and this it does with astounding completeness.”

Carl Jung, Two Essays on Analytical Psychology

The interpretation of dreams was an integral part of Jung’s therapeutic approach. According to his own estimate, he analyzed no less than 80,000 dreams. In his Seminar on Dreams, Jung stated that *“dreams are messages sent up from the unconscious”*. And so to grasp the significance of dreams, we must understand how Jung conceived of the unconscious psyche. In a lecture given in 1934, Jung wrote that *“It is as if our consciousness were...a ship on the great sea of the unconscious.”*

(*Carl Jung, ETH Zurich*) The fate of a ship is partially determined by the activity of the sea and likewise the direction of our life is highly influenced by the unconscious. Furthermore, just as the sea contains resources, treasures, and dangers that are not easily seen from the surface, so too potentials for good and evil are hidden in our unconscious depths. Psychological development, according to Jung, is facilitated by bringing unconscious contents into the light of consciousness, for this enriches our conscious personality, increases our knowledge, and promotes psychological wholeness. “*One does not become enlightened by imagining figures of light, but by making the darkness conscious.*” (*Carl Jung, Alchemical Studies*) More than any other phenomenon dreams can facilitate this process as they act as a window into the unconscious mind, or as Jung explains:

“...the dream is a spontaneous self-portrayal, in symbolic form, of the actual situation in the unconscious...The dream is specifically the utterance of the unconscious.”

Carl Jung, Structure and Dynamics of the Psyche

Paying attention to our dreams, and therein making more of the unconscious conscious, bestows many benefits. One of which is that dreams contain insights which in waking life we are unable, or unwilling, to see.

“When we sleep the soul is lit up completely by many eyes; with them we can see everything that we could not see in the daytime.”

Aeschylus

Intuitions or gut feelings that are not consciously processed, subtle hunches about the true character of other people, as well as blind spots and self-deceptions that are inhibiting our development – all are examples of insights which our unconscious can reveal in dreams. This ability of a dream to disclose knowledge otherwise unavailable to waking consciousness is why throughout history, in the words of Jung, “*the dream has been regarded as a truth-telling oracle.*” Or as Jung explains in more detail:

“The unconscious is the dark being within that hears what our conscious ears do not hear, and sees what our conscious eyes do not perceive...We only become aware of this unheard hearing, this unseen seeing, when the unconscious sends us these forgotten images in dreams.”

Carl Jung, ETH Zurich 1933-41

As windows into the unconscious, dreams also provide us with information about the health, or sickness, of our body. For the unconscious is intimately connected to the biology of the body and involved in regulating the functioning of organs. It is thus capable of detecting subtle abnormalities in the body, and it is not unusual for the unconscious to disclose these abnormalities in dreams, long before any overt symptoms show. Or as the Jungian psychoanalyst James Hall explains:

“It is by no means an easy matter to make organic diagnoses from dream material, although there are many striking examples of such predictions: the dream of an inner “explosion” preceding the leaking of an aortic aneurysm, the appearance of dream figures with gall bladder disease prior to that illness being suspected in the dreamer, etc.”

James Hall, Jungian Dream Interpretation

Dreams can also warn us of the type of future that may manifest if we continue in our errant ways.

“Dreams prepare, announce, or warn about certain situations, often long before they actually happen. This is not necessarily a miracle or a precognition. Most crises or dangerous situations have a long incubation, only the conscious mind is not aware of it. Dreams can betray the secret.”

Carl Jung, The Symbolic Life

Jung provides an example of a dream of this type. Jung’s colleague, an amateur mountaineer, told Jung of the following dream: He was climbing a mountain, and the higher he climbed, the better he felt. When he reached the summit of the mountain he wanted to continue to climb and so he stepped off the summit into thin air, and suddenly he awoke.

Jung intuitively felt this dream to be a warning from the unconscious. He implored his colleague to take extra precautions on any future climbs or avoid them altogether. But the man did not heed the advice. Three months later the man went climbing, and in the words of Jung:

“A guide standing below saw him literally step out into the air while descending a rock face. He fell on the head of his friend, who was waiting lower down, and both were dashed to pieces far below.”

Carl Jung, Practice of Psychotherapy

Dreams also play an important role in the creative process. We know from the history of philosophy, science, art, and literature, that many great creations and discoveries have been inspired by dreams. A dream informed the Russian chemist Dmitry Mendeleyev of the correct order of the elements based on atomic weight. August Kekule was shown the structure of the benzene ring in a dream. The basic theme of Robert Louis Stevenson’s novel *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* came to him in a dream. While Carl Jung stated that all his greatest ideas were conceived in dreams:

“In the end, the only events in my life worth telling are...inner experiences, amongst which I include my dreams and visions. These form the *prima materia* of my scientific work. They were the fiery magma out of which the stone that had to be worked was crystallized.”

Carl Jung, Memories, Dreams, Reflections

Dreams also have the capacity to break us free from a worldview that is too constricting and from a day-to-day existence that is too mundane. The dreams that do this are sometimes called “big dreams”. Big dreams are the highly significant dreams that are often remembered for a lifetime, and some even prove to be among the most valuable experiences of life. These are the dreams that possess a religious or spiritual significance, provide insights regarding the eternal questions of life, and even transform how we view ourselves and the world. Regarding the nature of big dreams, the Swiss psychologist Marie-Louise von Franz writes:

“Occasionally, one has a dream that is so remote from one’s life, so numinous (Jung’s favorite word for intensely moving experience), and so strange and uncanny that it does not seem to belong to the dreamer. It is like a visitation from another world, which in truth it is, the other world being the subterranean one of the unconscious. In ancient

times, and even today among some people, such dreams are regarded as messages from the gods or ancestral figures. These dreams are called “big” dreams by Jung.”

Marie-Louise von Franz, Dreams

Jung recounted a particularly striking big dream he experienced in 1944, just after suffering a heart attack that nearly killed him. Jung dreamt that he was walking in the wilderness and stumbled upon an old chapel. When he entered the chapel, he saw a yogi seated in the lotus position, in deep meditation. Jung continues:

“When I looked at him more closely, I realized that he had my face. I stared in profound fright, and awoke with the thought: ‘Aha, so he is the one who is meditating me. He has a dream and I am it.’ I knew that when he awakened, I would no longer be.”

Carl Jung, Memories, Dreams, Reflections

Big dreams are rare. Most people experience no more than a handful of them. The dreams that most frequently populate our sleeping hours are what Jung called compensatory dreams. The function of such dreams is to compensate, or correct for, the one-sidedness, errors, deviations, or other deficiencies of our conscious attitude. The more our conscious mind is ill-adapted to reality, and the more we are evading the tasks of life, the more we will be visited by dreams of a compensatory nature.

“When we pay attention to our dreams a self-regulating tendency in the soul comes into play which counterbalances the one-sidedness of consciousness or completes it so that a kind of wholeness and a life’s optimum is achieved.”

Marie-Louise von Franz, Dreams

A few examples will help clarify the nature of compensatory dreams. A man who is not fulfilling his duties as a father will have dreams that his children hate him in order to bring him to the awareness that he is avoiding one of the most important tasks of life. A woman who is too identified with her persona, or social personality, will have dreams of committing crimes or engaging in immoral behavior so that she sees the shadow, or unconscious dark side of her personality, that she needs to integrate to develop a more complete character. Or a man who approaches middle age, yet remains dependent on his parents, will have dreams that portray him as a helpless child, or as being smothered to death, so that he becomes aware of the perilous situation which his lack of independence is creating.

“...the compensatory function of dreams offers welcome assistance. [Compensatory dreams]...illuminate the patient’s situation in a way that can be exceedingly beneficial to health. They bring him memories, insights, experiences, awaken dormant qualities in the personality, and reveal the unconscious element in his relationships. So it seldom happens that anyone who has taken the trouble to work over his dreams...remains without enrichment and a broadening of his mental horizon.”

Carl Jung, Development of Personality

But if dreams are significant messages sent from the unconscious, why are they so difficult to decipher? Why doesn’t the unconscious present these messages to us in a form that is easier for our

conscious mind to understand? While the conscious mind is capable of rationality and logic, the unconscious is by nature irrational – it does not operate by the laws of logic and it communicates primarily in symbols, not words.

“As a plant produces its flower, so the psyche creates its symbols. Every dream is evidence of this process.”

Carl Jung, The Symbolic Life

The fact that the conscious and unconscious mind communicate in different languages explains why dreams are enigmatic. Yet just because we do not fully understand the meaning of the symbols presented to us in dreams, does not mean they do not influence us. For just as fairy tales, myths, religious teachings and rituals transcend rational understanding yet have influenced human beings for thousands of years, dreams can influence the course of our life even if we do not fully understand them.

“Dreams pave the way for life, and they determine you without you understanding their language.”

Carl Jung, The Red Book

Or as Jung explained elsewhere:

“It is often objected that the [dream] must be ineffective unless the dream is understood. This is not so certain, however, for many things can be effective without being understood. But there is no doubt that we can enhance its effect considerably by understanding the dream, and this is often necessary because the voice of the unconscious so easily goes unheard.”

Carl Jung, Structure and Dynamics of the Psyche

To understand dreams and thereby enhance their effects, we should make a habit of recording our dreams first thing in the morning – for memories of dreams quickly fade as we go about our day. When we come across a dream which we feel is particularly significant, we can engage in what Jung called dream amplification. Amplifying a dream involves reflecting on the dream and weaving ideas, concepts, and associations around it. This might include recalling memories that we think are related to the dream, allowing our intuition to freely speculate on its meaning, or thinking about whether the dream is related to a task we are not fulfilling or if it is compensating for a conscious attitude that is ill adapted to the demands of life. In interpreting a big dream, amplification is aided by knowledge of mythology and religion, for big dreams are often composed of the recurring symbols and motifs that are found cross-culturally in religions and myths. We will know that we have stumbled upon a correct dream interpretation when, in the words of Jung,

“...the interpretation “clicks”; when there is the feeling that it absolutely hits the fact, one knows one is on the right track.”

Carl Jung, Seminar on Dreams

Or as von Franz elaborates regarding Jung’s method of dream amplification:

“Jung did not interpret his dreams by immediately forming a clear idea of what they meant; instead, he carried them around within himself, lived with them inwardly, as it were, and asked questions of them. If he came across something in a book or in an outer experience which reminded him of a dream image, he would add it to that image, so to speak, so that a fabric of ideas developed, with a constantly increasing richness.”

Marie-Louise von Franz, Dreams

If we pay more attention to our dreams and devote more time to understanding them, we will possess an effective antidote against many of the collective sicknesses of our age. For in Jung's analysis, much of what plagues modern society, be it endemic levels of neurotic illnesses, mass-delusions, a widespread level of cowardice amongst the general population, an extreme susceptibility to propaganda, or a sheeplike obedience to corrupt authority figures, is the result of a dangerous disconnect between the conscious mind and the unconscious. Modern man has lost touch with his instincts, with the basic facts of human nature, and with a commonsense wisdom that is millions of years old. As it is dreams that help forge a connection to this ancient ground of our being, the more we pay attention to our dreams, the more we will find the inner strength and intuitive wisdom needed to thrive in a sick society. Or as Jung explains:

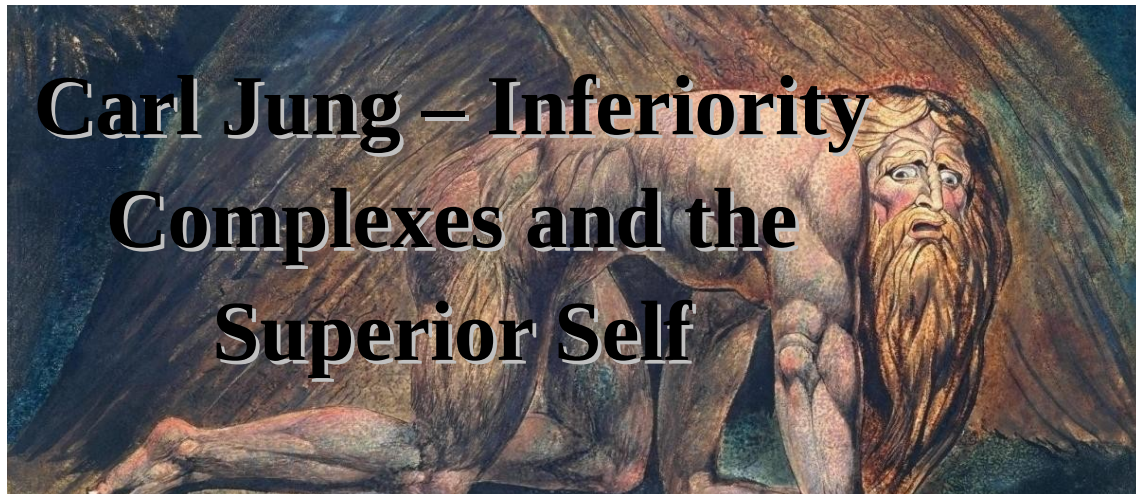
“Dreams are impartial, spontaneous products of the unconscious psyche, outside the control of the will.”, explains Jung. “They are pure nature; they show us the unvarnished, natural truth, and are therefore fitted, as nothing else is, to give us back an attitude that accords with our basic human nature when our consciousness has strayed too far from its foundations and runs into an impasse.”

Carl Jung, Civilization in Transition



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“When a man can say of his states and actions, “As I am, so I act,” he can be at one with himself . . .and he can accept responsibility for himself even though he struggles against it.”

Carl Jung, Two Essays on Analytical Psychology

Carl Jung was a man of eclectic interests and this is reflected in the prolific nature of his writings. But of all he wrote one topic stands alone as the most important to him and this is the question of how one can cultivate a great character. For Jung recognized the truth to Heraclitus’ statement that our “character is destiny”. The blows of fate may be kind or cruel and other people may treat us poorly or well, but our experience of these things and what we do with what we are given is dependent on the state of our character. The cultivation of a great character is a task of the utmost importance and in this video we will explore some of Jung’s insights on how we can achieve this feat, a feat he referred to as individuation or simply as self-realization.

To begin it is important to point out that Jung believed the attainment of a great character was something that anyone of us can achieve. It is not contingent on external success, be it the accumulation of wealth or social status, nor does it require exceptional talents or intellectual abilities, for as Jung put it:

“ . . in order to undergo a far-reaching psychological development, neither outstanding intelligence nor any other talent is necessary. . . ”

Carl Jung, Two Essays on Analytical Psychology

To understand what is necessary a quote from Jung’s essay *The Philosophical Tree* can point us in the right direction:

“One does not become enlightened by imagining figures of light, but by making the darkness conscious.”

Carl Jung, The Philosophical Tree

To become one of the few who exists in a state of harmony and who can state with confidence “*As I am, so I act*” we must be willing to look within, to shine a light on the darkness of our unconscious and to integrate what we discover into conscious awareness. Jung places so much emphasis on the power of the unconscious to transform who we are due to the fact that it is the far larger realm of our total psyche. What we are aware of, or what exists in the field of our consciousness, is only ever a sliver of our total personality. We repress much about who we are, forget even more, and there even exist, according to Jung, potentialities and instinctual energies of which we may spend our entire life in total ignorance.

But even if we accept that the unconscious contains much that could be integrated into our character is there not a good reason why these things are unconscious in the first place? Is it not better to allow some elements of our personality to reside outside of our awareness? Jung answers this question with an emphatic no and for the simple reason that the elements of our unconscious continue to influence us even though we are unaware of their existence. The main difference, in other words, between a psychic element that we are aware of and one that is unconscious, is that what exists in consciousness can potentially be controlled, while what exists in the unconscious has an autonomous existence and therefore will often produce effects inimical to our well-being:

“The rejection of the unconscious usually has unfortunate results. . . The more negative the attitude of the conscious towards the unconscious, the more dangerous does the latter become.”

Carl Jung, Symbols of Transformation

A further reason for becoming more self-aware, is because the unconscious is not only home to elements of our character which conflict with our self-image and elicit shame, such as our character faults and weaknesses, but it also contains much of what is best about us. This is especially true in the modern day, where we tend to rely too much on our social role, or what Jung called the persona, in the building up of our character. In so doing we make

“. . . a formidable concession to the external world, a genuine self-sacrifice which drives the ego straight into identification with the persona, so that people really do exist who believe they are what they pretend to be.”

Carl Jung, Two Essays on Analytical Psychology

Our persona should never define us, it should merely be a role we play at appropriate times. For when come to believe we are the masks we wear we will have sacrificed all the good of our character that does not align with the trends of conformity upon which our persona was sculpted. Our true “*self retires into the background and gives place to social recognition*” (Carl Jung) and we become a mirror of what we think others want us to be. This all comes with a sharp price to pay, for too much is left in the dark, too much of our character is denied and a divided self is created.

“A man cannot get rid of himself in favour of an artificial personality without punishment,” wrote Jung. “Even the attempt to do so brings on, in all ordinary cases,

unconscious reactions in the form of bad moods, affects, phobias, obsessive ideas, backslidings, vices, etc. The social “strongman” is in his private life often a mere child where his own states of feeling are concerned; his discipline in public (which he demands quite particularly of others) goes miserably to pieces in private.”

Carl Jung, Two Essays on Analytical Psychology

To cultivate a great character, we must be one of the few who heals the internal division that arises from too strong an identification with our social role. We need to accept that our persona represents only part of our total character and it must become our imperative duty to strip away our social mask and to learn what lies beneath. To achieve this task Jung suggests that we start by adopting a more collective view of who we are. Our gaze should turn outward and we should observe and take note of the character traits of those around us. This advice may seem paradoxical, as our persona is formed primarily through the observation and imitation of other people. But the point of this exercise is to learn about what resides behind the masks of our peers and to expose ourselves to the elements that occupy their unconscious. For it is far easier to look beyond the persona of another person, to notice the discrepancies in their behaviour, the cracks in their armour, so to speak, than it is to recognize these same elements within ourselves. Furthermore, due to the tendency to project unconscious traits of our character on to those around us this exercise will also bring us into contact with these projected elements.

If we are astute in our observation this collective turn will make it easier for us to accept a more complete picture of who we are as we will come to realize that

“Everyone has in him something of the criminal, the genius, and the saint.”

Carl Jung, Two Essays on Analytical Psychology

But character development does not end with the recognition of our shared human nature, rather the goal toward which we strive, namely greatness of character, requires that we give a unique order and style to these universal elements. We must in the words of Jung “*embrace our innermost, last, and incomparable uniqueness*”. For while much about human nature is shared, Jung also emphasized that the distribution of these shared traits and the degree to which each person can develop a certain capacity is always unique.

“The idiosyncrasy of an individual is not to be understood as any strangeness in his substance or in his components, but rather as a unique combination, or gradual differentiation, of functions and faculties which in themselves are universal. Every human face has a nose, two eyes, etc., but these universal factors are variable, and it is this variability which makes individual peculiarities possible. [Self-realization], therefore, can only mean a process of psychological development that fulfils the individual qualities given; in other words, it is a process by which a man becomes the definite, unique being he in fact is.”

Carl Jung, Two Essays on Analytical Psychology

A useful approach for bringing a proper order to the unique configuration of our character is to pay attention to any traits, that when observed in others, trigger feelings of inferiority in ourselves. A particular sensitivity to a character trait of another person, and this is true of both strengths and

weaknesses, is a good sign that this is a trait which for too long has existed in the darkness of our unconscious:

“[A] sense of moral inferiority” writes Jung “always indicates that the missing element is something which, to judge by this feeling about it, really ought not to be missing, or which could be made conscious if only one took sufficient trouble. . .Whenever a sense of moral inferiority appears, it indicates not only a need to assimilate an unconscious component, but also the possibility of such assimilation.”

Carl Jung, Two Essays on Analytical Psychology

As we integrate more elements of our character into the light of consciousness we will be moving toward the ideal of psychological wholeness, and wholeness according to Jung, is the defining mark of a great character and the means to ever more control of our destiny. For each time we accept a weakness, rather than denying it, we gain some influence over it and we can learn to minimize its effects on us. Each time we discover a new strength of our character, a new set of possibilities opens up before us and our life will be all the better for it. For these reasons there is no task we can set before ourselves, no life project we can adopt, that is more rewarding than the cultivation of a great character. And unlike other life projects, which often require the cooperation of external factors, be it money or other people, this project requires no such things. We can undertake this project at any moment we choose and given the brevity and uncertain nature of existence, now is always the best moment to begin on the life altering journey of discovering more fully who we are:

“It is under all circumstances an advantage to be in full possession of one’s personality, otherwise the repressed portions of the personality will only crop up as a hindrance elsewhere, not just at some unimportant point, but at the very spot where we are most sensitive: this worm always rots the core. Instead of waging war on himself it is surely better for a man to learn to tolerate himself, and to convert his inner difficulties into real experiences instead of expending them in useless fantasies. Then at least he lives and does not waste his life in fruitless struggles.”

Carl Jung, Two Essays on Analytical Psychology



“...when all is said and done, our own existence is an experiment of nature, an attempt at a new synthesis.”

[Carl Jung, Structure & Dynamics of the Psyche](#)

While Carl Jung is best known for his ideas on the unconscious, be it his theory of the archetypes or his writings on the shadow side of man, Jung was first and foremost a practicing psychologist. Throughout his voluminous writings one can find many practical tips on how to live a better life and in this video we are going to explore this side of Jung's work, focusing our attention on his favored method of self-development, which he called the process of individuation.

To individuate is to self-realize with the aim of moving toward psychological wholeness. Wholeness is an ideal state wherein all our latent potentials are actualized and all the elements of our unconscious brought to the light of consciousness and integrated harmoniously into our character structure. In the brevity of a human life, we can only ever approach, but never fully reach the condition of psychological wholeness. But moving in this direction generates fulfillment and leads to the cultivation of a character that is rooted in our individuality and which transcends mere social roles and the expectations of our peer group and society at large, or as Jung explains:

“Individuation means becoming an “in-dividual,” and, in so far as “individuality” embraces our innermost, last, and incomparable uniqueness, it also implies becoming one's own self. We could therefore translate individuation as “coming to selfhood” . . .”

[Carl Jung, Two Essays in Analytical Psychology](#)

Individuation as a method of self-development offers many benefits over following the well-worn paths of conformity. Firstly, this process makes us more capable in life. For as we aim toward psychological wholeness we increase the number of skills and character traits at our disposal and so

augment our capacity to take advantage of life's opportunities and to deal with its problems. Individuation is also an effective antidote to diseases of despair, be it anxiety disorders, neuroses, depressions or certain forms of addiction. For while these conditions can stem from a myriad of causes one of the most common is an unlived life, or the feeling that we are stagnating, in conjunction with a nagging awareness of our ever approaching death. Individuation forces us out of these ruts of being and places us on a life path that is both purposeful and meaningful. A further benefit of individuation is that a by-product of approaching the state of psychological wholeness is the spontaneous formation of an attitude that affirms life and which, in the words of Jung, "*is beyond the reach of emotional entanglements and violent shocks – a consciousness detached from the world.*" ([Carl Jung, Alchemical Studies](#))

Or as Jung writes elsewhere:

"If you sum up what people tell you about their experiences [on the path of individuation], you can formulate it this way: They came to themselves, they could accept themselves, they were able to become reconciled to themselves, and thus were reconciled to adverse circumstances and events."

[Carl Jung, Psychology and Religion](#)

To attain the benefits of individuation requires that we take a step that is simple in theory, but difficult in practice. We must focus our attention selfward and in the most objective manner possible assess our life and the current state of our character.

"[W]isdom begins only when one takes things as they are. . . So it is a healing attitude when one can agree with the facts as they are. . . only then can we thrive."

[Carl Jung, Visions: Notes of the Seminar Given in 1930–1934, Vol. I](#)

A radical self-acceptance is needed to individuate. This entails identifying, and accepting our character flaws and weaknesses, but also our talents and strengths. It requires an acceptance of past mistakes and failures and a clear grasp of the current conditions of our life in the recognition that "[we] cannot go forward except from the place where [we] happens to be". ([Carl Jung, Civilization in Transition](#)) And perhaps most importantly we need to accept that there exists a vast potential within us and that the possibilities for our development are endless, or as Jung writes:

"Since [the] growth of personality comes out of the unconscious, which is by definition unlimited, the extent of the personality now gradually realizing itself cannot in practice be limited either. . ."

[Carl Jung, Psychology and Religion](#)

But while self-acceptance is a preparatory step on the path of individuation, it is also a step that in and of itself produces strong therapeutic benefits. In Volume 13 of his collected works Jung quotes a letter from one of his patients about the inner change that occurs when one comes to accept him or herself:

"Out of evil, much good has come to me. By keeping quiet, repressing nothing, remaining attentive, and by accepting reality – taking things as they are, and not as I wanted them to be – by doing all this, unusual knowledge has come to me, and unusual powers as well, such as I could never have imagined before. I always thought that when

we accepted things they overpowered us in some way or other. This turns out not to be true at all, and it is only by accepting them that one can assume an attitude towards them.”

Carl Jung, Alchemical Studies

In addition to *self*-acceptance, Jung also advocates an increased acceptance of those close to us, particularly of our family members. Jung maintained that far too many people, waste far too much time, in the tangles of what he called the “boring family drama”. Unless we have suffered a traumatic experience that we have yet to come to terms with, it is better to accept any past mistreatment as a given condition of our life. Playing the victim, dwelling in pity or blame, trying to change another or trying to account for why we were mistreated is wasted life, or as Jung writes:

“But no matter how much the parents and grandparents may have sinned against the child, the man who is really adult will accept these sins as his own condition which has to be reckoned with. Only a fool is interested in other people’s guilt, since he cannot alter it. The wise man learns only from his own guilt.”

Carl Jung, Psychology and Alchemy

Practicing a radical self-acceptance in conjunction with an increased acceptance of others, places us on the firm ground of reality from which to take the next step on the path of individuation and this is to adopt a goal or life mission.

“I have observed that a life directed to an aim is in general better, richer, and healthier than an aimless one, and that it is better to go forwards with the stream of time than backwards against it.”

Carl Jung, Structure & Dynamics of the Psyche

Adopting a goal or life mission is integral to individuation as psychological wholeness is not approached through mere passive meditation. Rather a constant embrace of challenges leads to the actualization of our potential and novel experiences bring unconscious contents to the light of consciousness and it is a life mission generates this full participation in life. What is more, a goal or mission, can help pull us from the passivity of a disease of despair by diverting our focus and energy from pathological interests, to more constructive and reality-based pursuits:

“Practical experience teaches us as a general rule that a psychic activity can find a substitute only on the basis of equivalence. A pathological interest, for example, an intense attachment to a symptom, can be replaced only by an equally intense attachment to another interest. . .”

Carl Jung, Structure & Dynamics of the Psyche

So as not to be delayed at the step of choosing a goal or life mission, we should realize, that there is no single “right” choice. Psychological wholeness can be approached from many angles so we just need to find something that is intrinsically rewarding enough to keep us motivated and challenging enough to create the novel experiences necessary for self-realization. But like all major life

decisions, in choosing a mission, we must be the one to decide, we should not rely on others to choose for us, or as Jung writes:

“Why are you looking around for help? Do you believe that help will come from outside? What is to come is created in you and from you. Hence look into yourself. Do not compare, do not measure. No other way is like yours. All other ways deceive and tempt you. You must fulfil the way that is in you.”

[Carl Jung, The Red Book](#)

With a mission in hand, we merely need to work towards its achievement, in a consistent and disciplined manner, in order to individuate, or as Jung writes:

“How are you fulfilling your life’s task ([your] “mission”), your *raison d’être*, the meaning and purpose of your existence? This is the question of individuation, the most fateful of all questions. . .”

[Carl Jung, Civilization in Transition](#)

To avoid being thrown off course we should be aware that as we walk the path of individuation we will encounter setbacks and failures and make mistakes and errors. But these experiences should not discourage us for as Jung wrote:

“We must make mistakes. We must live out our own vision of life. . .If you avoid error you do not live; in a sense even it may be said that every life is a mistake, for no one has found the truth.”

[Carl Jung, C. G. Jung Speaking](#)

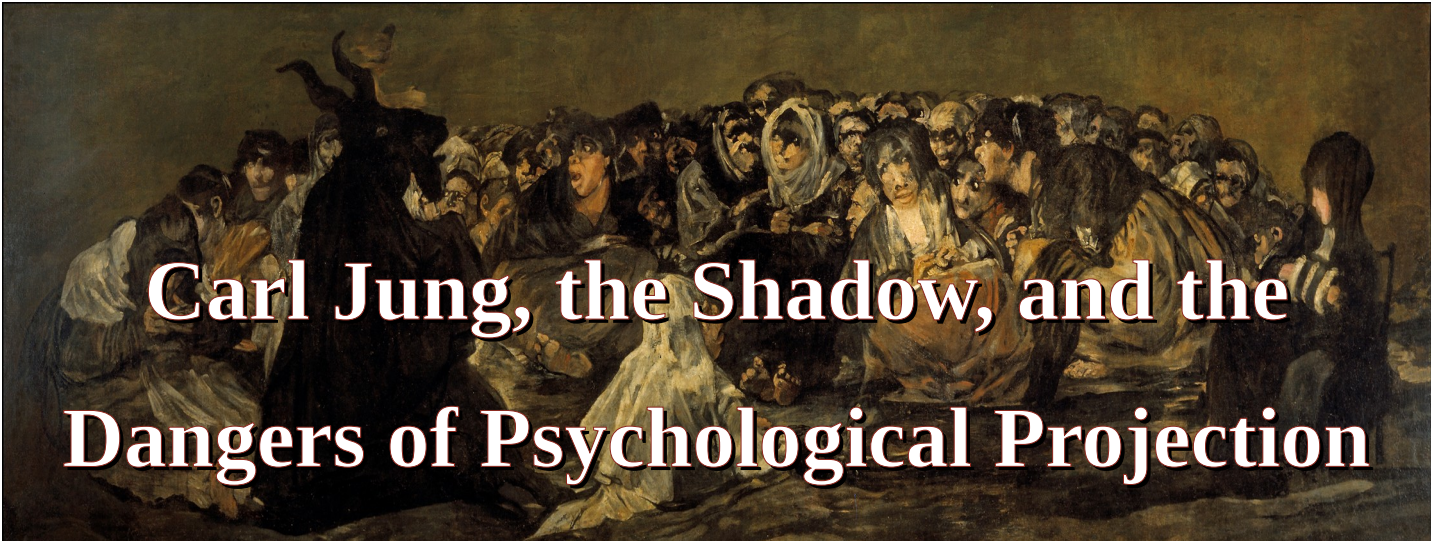
It is also useful to keep in mind that individuation does not free us from the conditions of human existence – we will still be haunted by our approaching mortality, while illness, injury and cruel twists of fate will still befall us. Like all paths in life, on the path of individuation, suffering is inevitable. When suffering comes our way, Jung was of the strong opinion that we shouldn’t flee from these situations, or deny or repress the feelings that accompany them, but instead we should experience our suffering to the fullest as only then can we move beyond it:

“Real liberation comes not from glossing over or repressing painful states of feeling, but only from experiencing them to the full.”

[Carl Jung, Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious](#)

But even though the path of individuation is challenging and even though it does not free us from suffering, it is a path that generates fulfillment and such cannot always be said of the paths of modern day conformity. If, therefore, we are stuck in a life of boredom, mediocrity, anxiety, depression or addiction Jung’s method of self-development offers a way out.

“Our personality develops in the course of life from germs that are hard or impossible to discern,” writes Jung “and it is only our deeds that reveal who we are. . . At first we do not know what deeds or misdeeds, what destiny, what good and evil we have in us, and only the autumn can show what the spring has engendered, only in the evening will it be seen what the morning began.” [Carl Jung, The Development of Personality](#)



Carl Jung, the Shadow, and the Dangers of Psychological Projection

“The sad truth is that man’s real life consists of a complex of inexorable opposites—day and night, birth and death, happiness and misery, good and evil. We are not even sure that one will prevail over the other, that good will overcome evil, or joy defeat pain. Life is a battleground. It always has been, and always will be.” (Carl Jung, Approaching the Unconscious)

Of the many metaphors used to describe a life in process, the metaphor of a battle is one of the more appropriate. In this battle our own self is both our greatest ally and our greatest opponent, with a dynamic tension existing between those elements of our personality moving us forward into personal growth and those holding us back. Each person must also contend with the potential for both good and evil that lies within. Whether our strengths and capacity for good get the upper hand, or our weakness and capacity for evil, is very much a product of this battle waged within the self.

Far too many people, however, set themselves up for defeat as they are unwilling to acknowledge the destructive side of their being. Utilizing various psychological defense mechanisms such people do their best to stay ignorant to their faults and weaknesses. In so doing these elements of their personality are relegated to their unconscious and make up the realm of the psyche Jung called the shadow. The shadow exerts an active influence on our personality and affects our behavior in a myriad of unforeseen ways. When we behave in a manner which is a product of our shadow, perhaps we treat someone poorly or take part in a self-destructive behavior, rather than taking responsibility for such actions, most people make use of the psychological phenomenon known as projection in order to avoid facing up to their shadow. In this video we are going to explore the phenomenon of projection by looking at the dangers it poses to the well-being of both the individual and society at large.

Projection occurs when we attribute an element of our personality, which resides in our unconscious, to another person or group. We can project both negative and positive characteristics, however, there is a greater tendency to project the former rather than the latter. Sigmund Freud, who

popularized the term in the mid-1890s, believed projection to be a defense mechanism used to avoid the anxiety that is provoked when one is forced to face up to their faults, weaknesses, and destructive tendencies. Jung's view of projection was similar to Freud's and as Jung explains in *Archaic Man*:

“Projection is one of the commonest psychic phenomena...Everything that is unconscious in ourselves we discover in our neighbour, and we treat him accordingly.”
(Carl Jung, *Archaic Man*)

Jung, however, stressed that projection was both an inevitable and necessary component in our psychological development as it is one of the primary means by which we can gain an awareness of elements residing in our unconscious. After projecting an element of our unconscious, the healthy thing to do is to recognize the subjective origin of the projection, to withdraw it from the external world, and to integrate this element of our personality into conscious awareness. Only by withdrawing our projections and becoming aware of the faults we previously projected onto others, can we ever hope to take corrective measures. This process of withdrawal and integration is a difficult task for it takes courage to face up to one's weaknesses and dark qualities. But while difficult, this task is crucial in the battle of life, for failure to confront one's shadow leaves these elements free to grow in scope and influence. As Jung explains:

“[W]hen one tries desperately to be good and wonderful and perfect, then all the more the shadow develops a definite will to be black and evil and destructive. People cannot see that; they are always striving to be marvellous, and then they discover that terrible destructive things happen which they cannot understand, and they either deny that such facts have anything to do with them, or if they admit them, they take them for natural afflictions, or they try to minimize them and to shift the responsibility elsewhere. The fact is that if one tries beyond one's capacity to be perfect, the shadow descends into hell and becomes the devil.” (Carl Jung, *Visions: Notes of the Seminar Given in 1930–1934*)

Those who rely too heavily on projection to shield them from their shadow, who never strive to question whether the image they hold of themselves is perhaps too perfect, go through life forever in need of scapegoats or people on whom to blame all their problems. Often a friend or family member is chosen as one's scapegoat, but the problem with this choice is that it irreparably damages and, in many cases, forces an end to the relationship. After driving one's scapegoat away, it is usually discovered that one's problems persist nonetheless. This spurs some to look within and to face up to the elements of their personality they have for so long tried to deny. But rather than partaking in this internal reflection, most people merely look for another scapegoat. In this process, it is often discovered, that the most effective form of scapegoat is not any individual in particular, but rather entire groups of people.

This tendency of scapegoating to occur on a collective level can have dangerous consequences for a society. Those unwilling, or unable, to face up to their shadows, are easy prey for collectivist movements which have ready-made scapegoats in the form of political opponents, members of different ethnic groups or socioeconomic classes. Scapegoating at the level of collectives, or in other words projecting our problems on to groups of people who differ from us, proves attractive for several reasons. It allows us to avoid the damage to our personal relationships which occurs when we use someone close to us as a scapegoat. Furthermore, given that our interactions with

members of the scapegoated group are usually limited, we do not risk awakening to the realization that these people are not nearly like the distorted image of them we hold in our psyche.

Scapegoating at a group level is made easier by the fact that those in the scapegoated group, being composed of individuals with their own weaknesses and flaws, may in fact behave in ways that provide legitimate reasons for indignation. Or as Jung put it:

“Not that these others are wholly without blame, for even the worst projection is at least hung on a hook, perhaps a very small one, but still a hook offered by the other person.”
(Carl Jung, On Psychic Energy)

But as Jung recognized there is a tendency within collectivist movements to take this small hook offered by one's opponents and to hang on it virtually all that is wrong with oneself and the world. When we cast a group of people in this negative light, seeing them as the primary source of all that ails a society, it becomes possible to justify persecution, violence, and perhaps even extermination of the group in question. Projection at the level of collectives becomes even more dangerous as those in positions of power can divert attention away from their own activities, and the harm they may be causing, by using propaganda, false flags, and other manipulation techniques, in order to cast blame on to ready-made scapegoats.

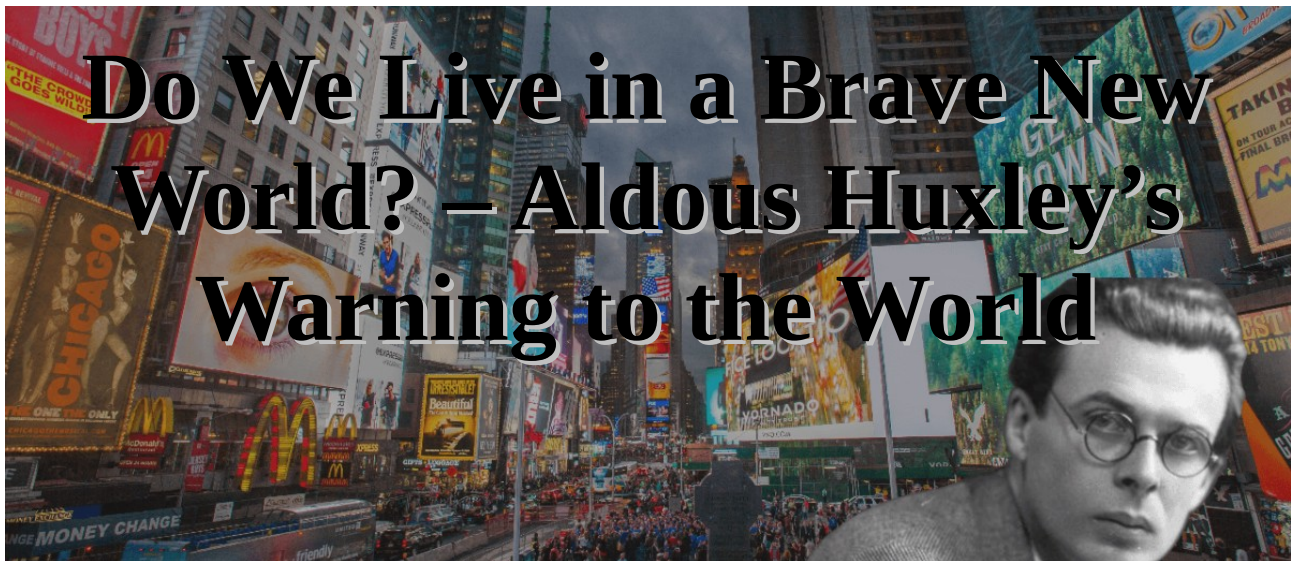
Due to the terrible consequences that can emerge at both the level of the individual and of society when we fail to recognize, in the words of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, that “the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being” (Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn), it is of the utmost importance that we strive to recognize our shadow qualities and to integrate them into our conscious awareness. Only then will we be in an adequate position to evaluate the true sources of evil in this world. On the other hand, if we fail to recognize the subjective origin of our projections, not only will our own well-being suffer, but we will contribute on a global scale to much unnecessary conflict. Jung went as far as to suggest that if psychological projection at a collective level became too widespread, war would be the likely outcome. For he believed that the greatest danger to human civilization lay not in the weapons we have at our disposal, but in the inability to understand our own selves. For it is this ignorance, and the failure to face-up to our own weaknesses and destructiveness, that causes what should be an internal battle to manifest itself in the external world.

“...modern people...are ignorant of what they really are. We have simply forgotten what a human being really is, so we have men like Nietzsche and Freud and Adler, who tell us what we are, quite mercilessly. We have to discover our shadow. Otherwise we are driven into a world war in order to see what beasts we are.” (Carl Jung, Visions: Notes of the Seminar Given in 1930–1934)



ACADEMY of IDEAS

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In his 1958 book *Brave New World Revisited*, Aldous Huxley wrote the following:

“If the first half of the twentieth century was the era of the technical engineers, the second half may well be the era of the social engineers — and the twenty-first century, I suppose, will be the era of World Controllers, the scientific caste system and *Brave New World*.”

[Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World Revisited*](#)

Thirty years prior to penning these words, Huxley wrote his classic work of fiction, *Brave New World*. Set in the distant future, this book depicts a scientifically managed dystopian society. In *Brave New World*, the ruling authorities attain mass-compliance not through force, but by supplying the masses with endless streams of distracting entertainment and manipulating them with drugs and other technological methods.

Huxley wrote *Brave New World* as a warning; advances in science and technology, he believed, were paving the way for the type of society depicted in his book. And he cautioned that if a *Brave New World* type of order solidifies, it could be the “final” or “ultimate” revolution; the people will have their liberties taken from them, but they will enjoy their servitude and so never question it, let alone rebel. In a 1962 interview at Berkeley University, Huxley explained:

“It seems to me that the nature of the ultimate revolution with which we are now faced is precisely this: That we are in the process of developing a whole series of techniques which will enable the controlling oligarchy who have always existed and will always exist to get people to love their servitude.”

Aldous Huxley, Interview – Berkeley University 1962

According to Huxley this Brave New World totalitarianism was most likely to solidify in the 21st century, and so in this video we are going to examine whether Huxley's predictions are coming true: Do we live in a Brave New World?

In Brave New World Revisited, Huxley wrote the following:

"In 1931, when Brave New World was being written, I was convinced that there was still plenty of time. The completely organized society, the scientific caste system, the abolition of free will by methodical conditioning, the servitude made acceptable by regular doses of chemically induced happiness...these were coming all right, but not in my time, not even in the time of my grandchildren...Twenty-seven years later...I feel a good deal less optimistic than I did when I was writing Brave New World. The prophecies made in 1931 are coming true much sooner than I thought they would...The nightmare of total organization...has emerged from the safe, remote future and is now awaiting us, just around the next corner."

[*Aldous Huxley, Brave New World Revisited*](#)

In Brave New World, advances in psychology made it possible for the ruling authorities to use mind control to condition citizens from an early age to think and behave in ways that were submissive and conformist. Nearly 100 years after Huxley wrote his dystopian novel, has this type of conditioning left the realm of fiction and entered reality?

"Today the art of mind-control is in the process of becoming a science. The practitioners of this science know what they are doing and why. They are guided in their work by theories and hypotheses solidly established on a massive foundation of experimental evidence."

[*Aldous Huxley, Brave New World Revisited*](#)

While the idea of mind-control may sound like science-fiction, in the mid-to-late-20th century many prominent philosophers, psychologists and scientists joined Huxley in sounding the alarm bell that research into the fundamentals of this phenomenon were well underway. In 1953, the distinguished British philosopher Bertrand Russell explained:

"It is to be expected that advances in physiology and psychology will give governments much more control over individual mentality than they now have even in totalitarian countries."

[*Bertrand Russell, The Impact of Science on Society*](#)

The renowned 20th century American clinical psychologist Carl Rogers warned that the rapid development of the Behavioral Sciences, which is a "a cluster of scientific disciplines...including psychology, psychiatry, sociology, social psychology, anthropology, and biology...economic and political science...mathematics and statistics" (Carl Rogers, On Becoming a Person), was in the process of becoming what he called an "'if-then' science". By this he meant that scientists and social engineers were discovering that if carefully constructed conditions are implemented in a society, then there is a high probability that the majority of citizens will respond to these conditions in predictable, and hence, controllable, ways. Or as he wrote in 1954:

"I believe that too few people are aware of the extent, the breadth, and the depth of the advances which have been made in recent decades in the behavioral sciences...the

increasing power for control which it gives will be held by some one or some group; such an individual or group will surely choose the purposes or goals to be achieved; and most of us will then be increasingly controlled by means so subtle we will not even be aware of them as controls...it appears that some form of completely controlled society...is coming.”

Carl Rogers, On Becoming a Person

In a report released in 2021, scientists on a subcommittee of the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE) in the UK admitted to using “totalitarian” mind-control tactics to obtain mass-compliance. One scientist went as far as to state that he was “stunned by the weaponisation of behavioural psychology over the last five years”, while another admitted:

“You could call psychology ‘mind control’. That’s what we do... clearly we try and go about it in a positive way, but it has been used nefariously in the past. Psychology has been used for wicked ends.”

Laura Dodsworth, A State of Fear

Along with conditioning the thoughts and behaviors of the citizens, in Brave New World the latest in technology is used by the ruling authorities to provide the population with “non-stop distractions of the most fascinating nature”. The purpose of this readily available entertainment was twofold: firstly, to ensure that the citizens did not pay attention to political and social realities, and secondly, to promote docility and stupidity and thus create a population that cared little for freedom. Is something similar happening today?

Whether intentionally imposed on society, or not, one thing is certain: Technology and the endless supply of stimulating yet morally degrading entertainment that flows from it is creating a passive, ignorant, and spiritually crippled population uninterested in resisting the implementation of its political chains – just as Huxley warned:

“As the art and science of manipulation come to be better understood, the dictators of the future will doubtless learn to combine [techniques of propaganda] with the non-stop distractions which, in the West, are now threatening to drown in a sea of irrelevance the rational [information] essential to the maintenance of individual liberty.”

Aldous Huxley, Brave New World Revisited

But it is not just an endless supply of distractions which makes possible a Brave New World. Huxley also predicted that in the future certain forms of technology would be used to increase the suggestibility and obedience of a population, so that everyone can “be depended upon to behave almost as predictably as machines” (Huxley).

In Brave New World, the technology used for this purpose was called hypnopaedia, or “sleep-teaching”, which Huxley called “the greatest moralizing and socializing force of all time”. Every night, while asleep, citizens were exposed to propaganda and repeated suggestions from the State. Huxley based his idea of sleep-teaching on the science of hypnosis. Scientists have long known that when an individual is placed under hypnosis alpha waves are activated in the brain, just as they are when in a light sleep. In both cases, suggestibility is dramatically heightened. As Huxley explained:

“Most of the things that can be done with and to a person in hypnotic trance can be done with and to a person in light sleep. Verbal suggestions can be passed through the... cortex to the midbrain, the brain stem and the autonomic nervous system. If these suggestions are well conceived and frequently repeated...new patterns of feeling can be installed and old ones modified, posthypnotic commands can be given, slogans, formulas and trigger words deeply ingrained in the memory.”

Aldous Huxley, Brave New World Revisited

While not subjects of sleep-teaching, many people in the modern world watch television, on a near daily basis, for hours on end. Scientists have known for decades that television watching activates alpha waves in the brain, thus placing the individual in a hypnotic-like trance – primed for suggestions and ready to be programmed. The neurosurgeon Adam Lipson explains:

“There have been EEG studies that demonstrate that television watching converts the brain from beta wave activity to alpha waves, which are associated with a daydreaming state, and a reduced use of critical thinking skills.”

Adam Lipson

When in a television-induced hypnotic state, cliches and slogans from the mainstream media, moral values and ideological principles from shows and movies, and suggestions from commercials, politicians, celebrities, and state-sponsored propaganda bypass the critical faculties and seep into the foundations of the mind. Over time the typical television watcher is transformed into an “opinionated robot” – his or her evaluations of the world are mindless regurgitations of whatever has been absorbed from the TV.

Nearly seventy years ago, the medical doctor Joost Meerloo warned of the hypnotizing dangers of television, dangers which now apply to computers, smart-phones, and any other technology which turns the human being into a mesmerized spectator of a screen.

“No longer does man think in personal values, following his own conscience and ethical evaluations; he thinks more and more in the values brought to him by mass media... television keeps him in continual awe and passive fixation. Consciously he may protest against these anonymous voices, but nevertheless their suggestions ooze into his system.”

Joost Meerloo, The Rape of the Mind

In Brave New World, suggestibility was heightened not just through the use of technology, but also with a super drug called Soma.

“The systematic drugging of individuals for the benefit of the State...was a main plank in the policy of the World Controllers.”

Aldous Huxley, Brave New World Revisited

Soma had no physiological drawbacks. When taken in small doses it stimulated a sense of bliss, and in larger doses it generated pleasant hallucinations and a refreshing sleep. It provided what Huxley called a “holiday from reality”, and most importantly, it made the citizens highly submissive.

“As well as tranquillizing, hallucinating and stimulating, the soma of my fable had the power of heightening suggestibility, and so could be used to reinforce the effects of governmental propaganda.”

Aldous Huxley, Brave New World Revisited

Today, not one Soma-like super-drug, but a whole concoction of drugs including but not limited to alcohol, marijuana, psychotropics, opioids, and sleeping-pills, are readily used as a means of escaping reality. The widespread use of drugs in our day has socio-political ramifications. For a drugged-up society, just like a dumbed-down society, is more easily conditioned into servitude. The chemical-dependent is not a politically vigilant person who is ready to defend liberty – and as Meerloo wrote:

“Any man who escapes from reality through the use of alcohol and drugs is no longer a free agent; he is no longer able to exert any voluntary control over his mind and his actions...Alcoholism and drug addiction prepare the pattern of mental submission so beloved by the totalitarian brainwasher...Drugs...can be used to make man a submissive and conforming being.”

Joost Meerloo, The Rape of the Mind

The society of Brave New World was also organized into a scientific caste system. Prenatal genetic engineering produced children destined to belong to one of five castes. The highest caste, Alpha, was made up of citizens genetically engineered to be intelligent, strong, and beautiful. The lowest caste, the Epsilons, were short, ugly, stupid, and treated as slaves. Each of the castes was forbidden to intermingle. Is a scientific caste system possible today?

While the widespread use of prenatal genetic engineering may not be on the near horizon, postnatal genetic engineering and the technological augmentation of the brain and body is in its initial stages. We are at the beginning of a fateful era in which man may merge with machine, and the result could be the formation of a two-tiered scientific caste system.

There will be a caste of human beings who welcome the merger with technology in the expectation of transcending biological limitations. And there will be an all-too-human caste, composed of people who resist the merger with technology. What restrictions will be placed on those in this latter caste? What surveillance and control will be possible on those who accept technological augmentations? What will be the “carrots on a stick” to entice people to transition into a transhumanist era? Time will tell.

“The world of tomorrow will witness a tremendous battle between technology and psychology. It will be a fight of technology versus nature, of systematic conditioning versus creative spontaneity.”

Joost Meerloo, The Rape of the Mind

If Huxley’s predictions are coming true, what can be done about it?

Perhaps nothing needs to be done. Perhaps the Brave New World totalitarianism which Huxley warned of is not feasible in the long term – not as stable as he thought. Perhaps this form of social order is destined to crumble under its own oppressive weight.

But perhaps Huxley was right. With enough advances in science and technology a Brave New World order can be achieved, and once fully instituted, this will be the final revolution. Human beings will be born and bred in conditions of technocratic servitude that they will not challenge or resist, because it will be a servitude that most of them love and defend. If this should turn out to be the case, Huxley's final words from Brave New World Revisited will prove prescient.

“Perhaps the forces that now menace freedom are too strong to be resisted for very long. It is still our duty to do whatever we can to resist them.”

Aldous Huxley, Brave New World Revisited



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Fear is one of the most powerful human emotions. While highly useful in situations where threat of immediate harm exists, it is the most debilitating and dangerous of emotions when present unnecessarily. In this video we will examine how fear can be used as a tool to manipulate others, and how those in positions of power, past and present, have effectively used fear to control certain aspects of society.

Humans, especially since the Industrial Revolution, have become increasingly protected from the dangers that our ancestors faced in relation to the natural world. But as mankind's fear of nature and the elements has fallen, in its place many other fears have come to fill the void. Some of these fears have arisen in response to real threats, but many have been in response to things imagined.

As the Stoic philosopher Seneca pointed out:

"There are more things...likely to frighten us than there are to crush us; we suffer more often in imagination than in reality." ([*Letters from a Stoic, Seneca*](#))

While some of these imagined fears are of one's own making, many are the consequence of narratives created by those in positions of power. Individuals looking to take advantage of, and manipulate others, have long realized the power of fear. When one is gripped by fear of a threat, real or imagined, their rational and higher cognitive capacities shut down, making them easily manipulable by anyone that promises safety from the threat.

"No passion so effectually robs the mind of all its powers of acting and reasoning as fear", wrote the 18th century philosopher Edmund Burke.

Ruling classes for thousands of years have understood the power of intentionally invoking fear in their subjects as a means of social control. Henri Frankfort, in his book *The Intellectual Adventure of Ancient Man*, noted that between 1800 and 1600 BC a fear psychosis spread through Ancient

Egypt, precipitated by the invasion of foreign rebels hungry for power and conquest. Initially this fear psychosis was justified by a real threat, yet even when these foreigners were successfully driven far away from Egypt, the ruling powers sought to artificially maintain fear among the population – realizing that a fearful population is easier to control than a fearless one.

As Frankfort explained:

“The common desire for security need not have survived after the Egyptian Empire extended the military frontier of Egypt well into Asia and thus removed the peril from the immediate frontier...However, it was a restless age, and there were perils on the distant horizon which could be invoked to hold the community together, since unity was to the advantage of certain central powers...A fear psychosis, once engendered, remained present. And there were forces in Egypt which kept alive this fear psychosis in order to maintain the unified purpose of Egypt.” ([The Intellectual Adventure of Ancient Man, Henri Frankfort](#))

The artificial construction and maintenance of fear in a population by a ruling class has remained pervasive from the time of Ancient Egypt up until the modern day. Oppressive governments often maintain their grip on a nation by continually invoking fear, and then proceeding to claim that only they, the ruling powers, have the means and ability to protect the population from such a threat:

“The whole aim of practical politics”, wrote HL Mencken, “is to keep the populace alarmed (and hence clamorous to be led to safety) by menacing it with an endless series of hobgoblins, most of them imaginary.”

John Adams, one of the founding fathers of America, echoed this sentiment writing “*Fear is the foundation of most governments*”.

While there are numerous tactics and strategies that have developed over the centuries to effectively exploit the public through fear, two of the more powerful and efficient are the use of false flags, and the implementation of propaganda via repetition.

A false flag can be defined as a “covert operation . . . designed to deceive in such a way that the operations appear as though they are being carried out by entities, groups, or nations other than those who actually planned and executed them”. In his book *Feardom*, Conor Boyack provides a nice explanation on the effectiveness of false flag attacks for those looking to institute social control:

“...physical attacks lead to a corresponding increase of trust in political leaders and submission to them. This effect is likely the same whether the attack be a surprise, known to political leaders yet allowed to happen, or directly orchestrated by these same leaders who stand to benefit from the increased trust and submission...False flag operations are used because people generally do not have access to the details, so they are prone to rely upon what they’re told, and thus are easily deceived. People will, for the most part, believe what they are told in times of crisis, and so government officials, whether their motives are good or evil, capitalize on or completely fabricate the crises.” ([Feardom: How Politicians Exploit Your Emotions and What You Can Do to Stop Them, Conor Boyack](#))

Repetition is also a well-known and prevalent propaganda technique used to solidify falsehoods and perpetuate fear in the public consciousness. By repeating specific phrases and warnings, and

displaying particular symbols and images over and over through various mediums, those in power are able to paralyze entire populations with a fear psychosis.

The Nazi Propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels was well aware of the power of repetition in cloaking falsehoods in a garb of truth, stating:

“It would not be impossible to prove with sufficient repetition and a psychological understanding of the people concerned that a square is in fact a circle. They are mere words, and words can be molded until they clothe ideas in disguise.” (Joseph Goebbels)

George Orwell, in a related manner, viewed political language as largely a form of propaganda designed to deceive people, as he wrote:

“Political language. . . is designed to make lies sound truthful and murder respectable, and to give an appearance of solidity to pure wind.” (George Orwell)

The technological advances of the last century have given those in power the ability to propagate their narratives and engage in fear mongering to an extent never before seen in history. However, despite the unnerving situation we find ourselves in, there is an antidote to the power of propaganda and fear mongering: that being, knowledge.

Plato rightly stated that *“ignorance is the root of misfortune”*, and as long as we remain ignorant of the fact that all too often those who claim to protect us from fear are actually manipulating our fears for their own benefit, then we will be contributing to the misfortune of the world through our ignorant compliance.

The philosopher Voltaire stated that *“Those who can make you believe absurdities can make you commit atrocities.”* To avoid being an individual who can be convinced of absurdities, one must become an active truth seeker, instead of an all too common passive propaganda receiver. An important step in becoming an active truth seeker is the realization that when evaluating the claims of those in power, skepticism is warranted and even necessary. Very often those who rule do not have the best interests of the public at heart; for as Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn put it *“political genius lies in extracting success even from the people’s ruin.”*

The reality is that most of us are not in a position to single-handedly change the world, but we can at least try to rid ourselves of the unnecessary fears which are the fuel for so much hate and destruction in the world. In fact, taking responsibility for one’s own actions and the beliefs that motivate such actions, may be the most important thing one can do when faced with the prospect of an oppressive government. For as Stanley Milgram noted: *“The disappearance of a sense of responsibility is the most far-reaching consequence of submission to authority.”* And furthermore, might there be truth to the comment by F.A. Harper’s that *“the man who knows what freedom means will find a way to be free.”*

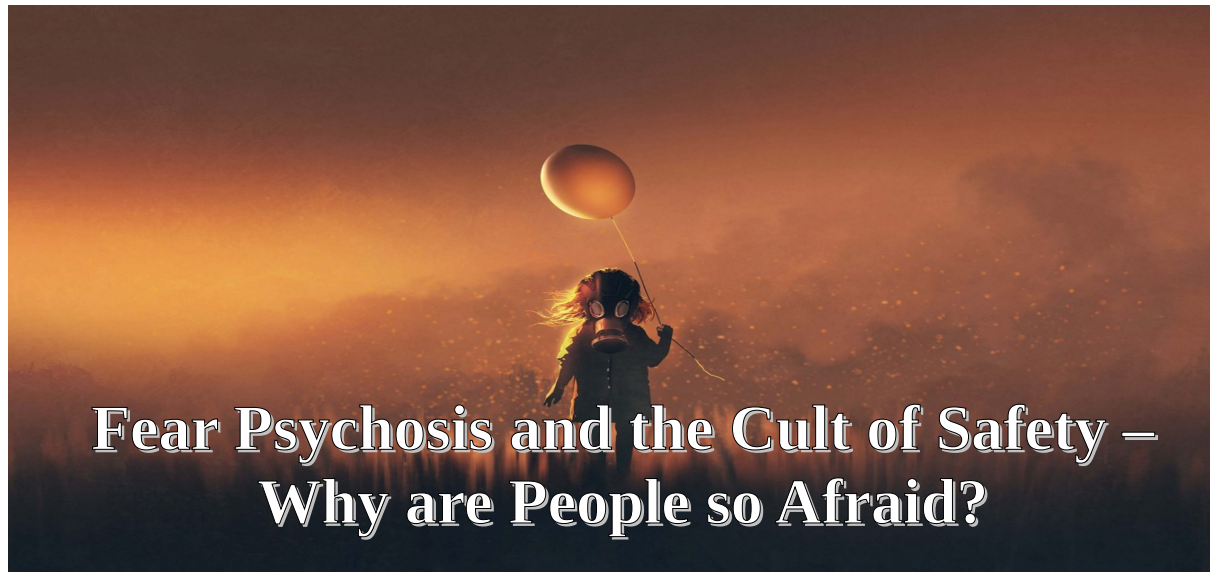
At this point some may be thinking that while the use of fear by those in power certainly contributed to horrible situations in the past, most notably in the totalitarian states of Russia, Germany and China in the 20th century, Western nations of the present are far from approaching a situation so dire. Hopefully that is true, but it is important to realize that those who have lived through the rise of oppressive governments have seldom realized the perilous situation they were in until it was too late. We will conclude this lecture with a fascinating but ominous passage from the book *They Thought They Were Free*, which is based on interviews with normal Germans who lived

during the Nazi regime. The following quote comes from one of the German's interviewed, where he discusses why he thought that more ordinary Germans didn't take a stand against the rise of the Nazi government.

"One doesn't see exactly where or how to move. Believe me, this is true. Each act, each occasion, is worse than the last, but only a little worse... You wait for one great shocking occasion, thinking that others, when such a shock comes, will join with you in resisting somehow..."

But the one great shocking occasion, when tens or hundreds or thousands will join with you, never comes. That's the difficulty. If the last and worst act of the whole regime had come immediately after the first and smallest, thousands, yes, millions would have been sufficiently shocked ... But of course this isn't the way it happens. In between comes all the hundreds of little steps, some of them imperceptible, each of them preparing you not to be shocked by the next...

And one day, too late, your principles, if you were ever sensible of them, all rush in upon you. The burden of self-deception has grown too heavy, and some minor incident. . collapses it all at once, and you see that everything – everything – has changed...Now you live in a world of hate and fear, and the people who hate and fear do not even know it themselves; when everyone is transformed, no one is transformed..." ([*They Thought They Were Free*, Milton Mayer](#))



Fear Psychosis and the Cult of Safety – Why are People so Afraid?

Is the modern world caught in the grip of a fear psychosis and has a cult of safety entrenched itself the West? In this video, we are going to explore these questions.

“Quite an experience, to live in fear, isn’t it? That’s what it is to be a slave.”

Blade Runner

Today we live longer than ever before. Our chance of dying from war, natural disaster, pandemics, or starvation are at levels our ancestors could only have dreamed of. But given all this security we are more fearful than ever before. From all corners of society there are warnings of potential dangers and imminent disaster, and as the sociologist Barry Glassner observed:

“...we are living in the most fearmongering time in human history. And the main reason for this is that there’s a lot of power and money available to individuals and organizations who can perpetuate these fears.”

Barry Glassner, Quoted in “Why We’re Living in the Age of Fear”

But it is not just manipulative fearmongering that is responsible for the disproportionate fear that infects our society, for in one way or another we all accept, and reinforce, the normality of fearing. We continually remind ourselves and others that threats exist everywhere – in the streets, in the food we eat, in the technology we use, in our fellow man and woman, and even in the air we breathe. The cultural narratives which inform how we make sense of the world seamlessly move from one fear to another. Hardly anyone questions, however, whether we should be so fearful. In his book *How Fear Works* the sociologist Frank Furedi exposes our culture of fear, and as he writes:

“. . .in the current era fearing appears to be such a volatile and directionless activity. It seems as if one threat begets another, only to be contradicted by yet another newly discovered target of fear.”

Frank Furedi, How Fear Works: Culture of Fear in the Twenty-First Century

Or as the philosopher Lars Svendsen likewise notes:

“There no longer seems to be anything that is really secure. . . We seem to be obsessed with every conceivable danger. . . Fear has become a basic characteristic of our entire culture.”

Lars Svendsen, A Philosophy of Fear

Life is unpredictable and the world is littered with dangers and threats to both our security and well-being, and so fearing is not unique to modern society. However, in some of the most flourishing civilizations of the past, fear was counterbalanced by hope and by an optimistic belief in the human potential. During the Renaissance and Enlightenment the idea that individuals and communities, through bold and creative action, could ward off dangers and shape the uncertain future, flourished. In Ancient Greece and Rome, courage was held in high regard and so individuals were proactive in the face of risks and daring in the presence of the unknown. “Fortune favours the brave”, according to the Latin proverb. Furthermore, in many past civilizations it was acknowledged that uncertainty is not only a source of potential danger but also of opportunity. But as Frank Furedi writes:

“That was then. In the twenty-first century, the optimistic belief in humankind’s ability to subdue the unknown has given way to a belief that it is powerless to deal with the perils that confront it...the flame of hope still flickers on but it is increasingly overshadowed by a dark mood of intangible anxiety.”

Frank Furedi, How Fear Works: Culture of Fear in the Twenty-First Century

The courage, hope, and optimism that in civilizations past kept fear in check is all but lost in the modern world, and so the lives of many of us are consumed by fear. We see everything through the distorted lens of fear, and regarding this perspective Frank Furedi elaborates:

“...this perspective [of fear] has been so thoroughly internalized that many who adopt this outlook are not aware of its influence on their behaviour. For most people, such a perspective comes across as common sense. This does not mean that people are perpetually scared or fearful; rather, the perspective of fear works by sensitizing people to focus on potential threats and dangers while distracting attention from the probable positive outcome of engaging with uncertainty.”

Frank Furedi, How Fear Works: Culture of Fear in the Twenty-First Century

In viewing the world through a perspective of fear, people see risks in things, behaviors, and activities which in generations past were not considered risky. They are overly fearful of threats which are an inevitable part of life. And they evaluate experiences first and foremost on the basis of the potential risks they entail.

“One of the accomplishments of the fear perspective is that it continually expands the number of issues that constitute a hazard and are therefore represented as risk. Since the 1980s numerous commentators have commented on the explosion of risks.”

Frank Furedi, How Fear Works: Culture of Fear in the Twenty-First Century

What is more, the meaning of risk has taken on a largely negative connotation. Up until the latter half of the 20th century, it was common sense that many risks are worth taking. So long as one was motivated by a noble enterprise, self-realization, by the spirit of adventure or by values such as freedom and truth, facing up to risks was acknowledged to be a precondition for the cultivation of character and even the accomplishment of greatness. Or as Nietzsche put it:

“The devotion of the greatest is to encounter risk and danger and play dice for death.”

Nietzsche, Thus Spoke Zarathustra

Instead of being celebrated, today the risk-taker is often castigated as foolish, selfish, and a danger to both himself and others. This negative perception of risk-taking is driven by worst-case thinking. Many people are predisposed to think of the worst that can happen, and then they behave as if it is likely to happen. This worst-case thinking has even infiltrated the highest levels of government, as some politicians and policy makers have adopted the utopian goal of socially-engineering a “zero-risk” society, and to the applause of the fearful masses.

“An ever-expanding obsession with risk is one of the most striking features of the culture of fear... In its most irrational version, some people demand ‘zero risk’ – a project that would require abolishing uncertainty completely.”

Frank Furedi, How Fear Works: Culture of Fear in the Twenty-First Century

In seeing risks almost everywhere and in being highly risk-averse, many people, without explicitly knowing it, are guided by the “precautionary principle.” According to the precautionary principle, when faced with any degree of uncertainty, the best option is to protect oneself and others and to side with caution. In recent years the precautionary principle has entrenched itself in public policy in the form of the inverted quarantine. While the purpose of a traditional quarantine is to seclude a sick person to prevent a disease from spreading to others, an inverted quarantine, in contrast, involves healthy people isolating themselves from the dangers they perceive as threatening, and as Furedi writes:

“Inverted quarantine constitutes a response to the fear that the human condition is inherently unsafe.”

Frank Furedi, How Fear Works: Culture of Fear in the Twenty-First Century

The belief that the human condition is inherently unsafe is the fundamental creed of the cult of safety, which has solidified itself in our society. In the last few decades safety has, in the words of Furedi, taken on a “quasi-religious quality”. The quest for safety has become the *raison d'être* of the West, and the rules and restrictions erected at the altar of safety have ballooned to absurd proportions and intruded on evermore areas of life. To make matters worse, no matter how irrational or authoritarian they are, and no matter whether there is any evidence they are effective, safety rules and restrictions are held by most people to be essential and beyond question.

“Safety and security have become their own arguments. Officials and organizations seem to believe that the mere mention of these words is enough—no further justification is needed...Safety rules are often assumed to be doing something good just because

they exist. “Safety and security theater,”...describes procedures whose main role is to convince everyone that someone somewhere is dealing with a threat, regardless of whether they are or not.”

Tracey Brown and Michael Hanlon, Playing by the Rules: How Our Obsession with Safety Is Putting Us All at Risk

An abundance of safety rules and restrictions are not making people feel safer; they are contributing to our culture of fear. For safety rules and restrictions communicate signals about potential dangers and threats, and so the more a society is inundated with them the more people assume that the environment is inherently unsafe. Furthermore, in placing limitations on the freedom to explore, experiment, and make one's own choices, rules and restrictions implicitly communicate to people that they are incapable of making their own risk assessments and assuming responsibility for their own life. The modern cult of safety is infantilizing people and increasing the chances that, from cradle to grave, they remain dependent on overbearing authority figures to keep them safe from what they have been socialized to believe to be a dangerous world.

“The act of trading in freedom does not make people feel safe. It heightens people's awareness of their lack of control over their lives and thereby enhances their sense of insecurity. The loss of any of our freedoms simply undermines people's capacity to deal with the threats they face.”

Frank Furedi, How Fear Works: Culture of Fear in the Twenty-First Century

Many safety rules and restrictions derive their perceived legitimacy from the authority of “The Science”. In contrast to science, which relies on evidence, experimentation, the testing of ideas, and whose conclusions are open to doubt and reinterpretation, The Science relies on trust in authority and does not tolerate skepticism. If The Science alerts us to a threat, or if politicians invoke The Science to justify heavy-handed measures, then those who refuse to blindly follow The Science are treated as the modern equivalent of a heretic.

“Statements like ‘The Science says’ serve as the twenty-first-century equivalent of the exhortation ‘God said’. Unlike science, the term ‘The Science’ serves a moralistic and political project. It has more in common with a pre-modern revealed truth than with the spirit of experimentation that emerged with modernity. The constant refrain of ‘Scientists Tell Us’ serves as a prelude for a lecture on what threat to fear...those who do not heed the warnings of experts are frequently castigated as irresponsible if not evil.”

Frank Furedi, How Fear Works: Culture of Fear in the Twenty-First Century

The fear that is infecting society is socially conditioned into us from a young age, and it is fuelled by a pessimistic conception of what it means to be human that is deeply entrenched in our society.

“...people are educated to be preoccupied with their safety, and to regard being fearful as a sensible and responsible orientation towards the world...Policy makers, opinion formers, and advertisers act on the basis that people are risk averse and feel powerless, and their messages normalize the perception that people are vulnerable.”

Frank Furedi, How Fear Works: Culture of Fear in the Twenty-First Century

This pessimistic conception of the human being is fundamentally flawed. For if vulnerability was the essential feature of the human being, the human race would have perished long ago. Although our lives are unpredictable and exposed, as humans we are more defined by our resilience and adaptability. Not only do we have a remarkable capacity to withstand threats, dangers, and hardships, but sometimes these even fast-track individual, familial, and societal growth.

The pessimistic pull of our culture of fear is strong. But if we can become more aware of how it operates, influences us, and shapes society, and if we can cultivate a more optimistic vision of the human condition and a courageous attitude toward the future, then it is possible to free ourselves from its crippling influence. Or as Furedi concludes in *How Fear Works*:

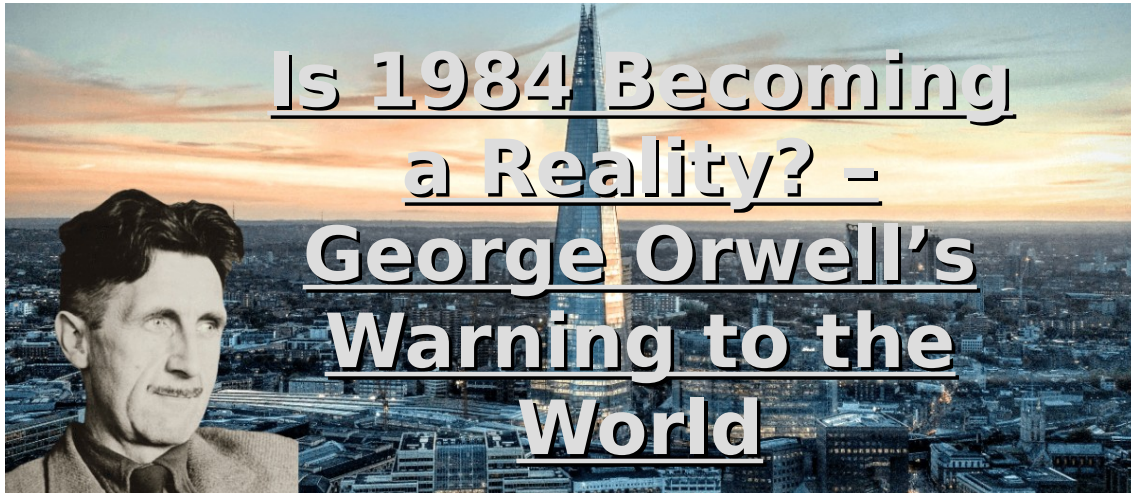
“Must we be defined by our vulnerability? Must we be fearful? The moment we ask these questions, we are well on the way to intuiting that there is always an alternative... Whether we adopt the philosophy of precaution or embrace a more courageous risk-taking approach depends on how [we perceive] what it means to be a human.”

Frank Furedi, How Fear Works: Culture of Fear in the Twenty-First Century



ACADEMY of IDEAS

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In 1940 George Orwell wrote:

“Almost certainly we are moving into an age of totalitarian dictatorships – an age in which freedom of thought will be at first a deadly sin and later on a meaningless abstraction. The autonomous individual is going to be stamped out of existence.”

George Orwell, Inside the Whale

George Orwell's dystopian novel 1984 is a work of fiction, but much that is depicted in it reflects the political realities of many nations, past and present.

“...at least three-quarters of what Orwell narrates is not negative Utopia, but history.”

Umberto Eco

Referring to his time spent in Belgrade under Communist Rule, Lawrence Durrell wrote that: “Reading [1984] in a Communist country is really an experience because one can see it all around one.”

In this video, we are going to explore some of the similarities between the totalitarian systems of the 20th century and Orwell's 1984, and as will become evident many of these totalitarian traits are re-emerging in the modern world. This investigation will be conducted in the recognition that totalitarianism relies on mass support, and so, contemporary societies desperately need more people to withdraw their support of this brutal form of rule. Shortly after 1984 was published, Orwell explained:

“The moral to be drawn from this dangerous nightmare situation is a simple one. Don't let it happen. It depends on you.”

George Orwell

Totalitarianism is a political system whereby a centralized state apparatus attempts to control virtually all aspects of life. “Everything within the state, nothing outside the state, nothing against the state.”, the Italian dictator Mussolini succinctly put it.

While totalitarianism can emerge under the guise of various political ideologies, in the 20th century it was communism and fascism that provided the ideological support for this type of rule. Communism and fascism are often viewed as being on opposite ends of the political spectrum, but in the manner they were put into practice in the 20th century both of these systems display the characteristics of the totalized, all-controlling state. Both use force and propaganda to attain power, crush economic and civil liberties, smother culture, partake in mass-surveillance, and terrorize the citizenry with psychological warfare and eventually mass-imprisonment and mass-murder. Speaking of Stalin’s Communist Russia and Hitler’s Nazi Germany, Orwell explained:

“The two regimes, having started from opposite ends, are rapidly evolving towards the same system—a form of oligarchical collectivism.”

George Orwell

In the communist and fascist political systems of the 20th century, and in 1984, the totalitarian regime maintained a tight grip of control on the populace through the use of manufactured fear.

“Totalitarian leaders, whether of the right or of the left, know better than anyone else how to make use of...fear...They thrive on chaos and bewilderment... The strategy of fear is one of their most valuable tactics.”

Joost Meerloo, Rape of the Mind

Constant surveillance of all of the citizens was an additional tool in the arsenal of the totalitarian regime of 1984. Surveillance not only allowed for more effective overt control of the citizenry but it also induced paranoia which made it less likely that any citizen would even dare step out of line. This surveillance was achieved, firstly, through the technology of the telescreen which was installed in everyone’s home and throughout the streets, and as Orwell explained:

“The telescreen received and transmitted simultaneously...There was of course no way of knowing whether you were being watched at any given moment...It was even conceivable that they watched everybody all the time. But at any rate they could plug in your wire whenever they wanted to. You had to live—did live, from habit that became instinct—in the assumption that every sound you made was overheard, and, except in darkness, every movement scrutinised.”

George Orwell, 1984

Secondly, mass-surveillance of the citizenry was conducted by the citizens of 1984 themselves. Each person watched everyone else, and each person was, in turn, watched by everyone else. The most innocent of expressions, an innocuous statement, or a subtle look of disapproval when Big Brother appeared on the telescreen, was reported to the Thought Police and treated as a “thoughtcrime” or a “facecrime” – as evidence that one was disloyal and had something to hide.

“It is intolerable to us that an erroneous thought should exist anywhere in the world, however secret and powerless it may be.”, Orwell has the character O’Brien explain.

George Orwell, 1984

In Stalinist Russia, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn noted that one could never be sure whether one’s neighbours, friends, co-workers, the postman, or even in some cases one’s own family, would report to the secret police a slip of the tongue, a criticism of Stalin or of Communism. For if one was reported their fate was usually sealed: the police would knock at the door in the middle of the night and soon after one would be given the standard sentence of a “tenner” – that is, 10 years in the slave labor gulag prison camps. This form of surveillance created social conditions wherein most citizens adopted hypocrisy and lying as a way of life, or as Solzhenitsyn explains in *The Gulag Archipelago*:

“The permanent lie becomes the only safe form of existence....Every wag of the tongue can be overheard by someone, every facial expression observed by someone. Therefore every word, if it does not have to be a direct lie, is nonetheless obliged not to contradict the general, common lie. There exists a collection of ready-made phrases, of labels, a selection of ready-made lies.”

Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, Gulag Archipelago

In addition to a ubiquitous state of fear, in totalitarianism there exists a widespread state of confusion and mental disorientation amongst the citizenry. Joost Meerloo explained:

“Many victims of totalitarianism have told me in interviews that the most upsetting experience they faced...was the feeling of loss of logic, the state of confusion into which they had been brought—the state in which nothing had any validity...they simply did not know what was what.” (Meerloo)

Joost Meerloo, Rape of the Mind

In 1984, widespread mental disorientation was stimulated via the falsification of history, and the negation of the concept of objective truth. The Ministry of Truth was the institution which falsified history.-

“Everything faded into mist. The past was erased, the erasure was forgotten, the lie became truth.”

George Orwell, 1984

One of the reasons totalitarian regimes attempt to alter history is because it rids the society of any past reference points, or standards of comparison, which might remind the citizens that life in the past was so much better than it is in the sterile and oppressive present.

“Within twenty years at the most...the huge and simple question, ‘Was life better before the Revolution than it is now?’ would have ceased once and for all to be answerable.”

George Orwell, 1984

But another reason history is falsified by totalitarians is to ensure there are no historical roots to which the citizen can anchor and find truth, sustenance and strength. In totalitarianism there can be no historical information which contradicts or puts into question the reigning political ideology, nor any institution, such as a religion, which offers the individual a refuge from the influence of the State. For a totalitarian regime to condition the citizenry to accept the proverbial boot stamping on its face, it needs to control the past, and so as Orwell wrote in 1984:

“Every record has been destroyed or falsified, every book has been re-written, every picture has been re-painted, every statue and street and building has been re-named, every date has been altered. And that process is continuing day by day and minute by minute. History has stopped. Nothing exists except an endless present in which the Party is always right.”

George Orwell, 1984

Along with destroying or falsifying the past, widespread mental disorientation is further cultivated by destroying the belief in objective truth. This is done through a program of psychological warfare. Incessant and intentionally confusing propaganda, conflicting reports and blatant lies, are pumped out in “official reports” and through the mass media at all hours of the day. What is said today has no bearing on what may be said tomorrow, for as Orwell explained:

“...the totalitarian state...sets up unquestionable dogmas, and it alters them from day to day. It needs the dogmas, because it needs absolute obedience from its subjects, but it cannot avoid the changes, which are dictated by the needs of power politics.”

George Orwell, Literature and Totalitarianism

In 1984, for example, the Ministry of Plenty put out a bulletin that they were increasing the chocolate ration to twenty grammes a week. Orwell writes:

“And only yesterday, [Winston] reflected, it had been announced that the ration was to be reduced to twenty grammes a week. Was it possible that [the citizens] could swallow that, after only twenty-four hours? Yes, they swallowed it...Was he, then, alone in the possession of a memory?”

George Orwell, 1984

In addition, contradictions, hypocrisies and lies form the foundation of the totalitarian ideology. The totalitarian system presents the enslavement of the individual as his or her liberation; censoring information is called protecting the truth; the destruction of culture or the economy is called its development; the military occupation of other countries is labeled as the furtherance of freedom and peace. In 1984, the Ministry of Peace instigated wars, the Ministry of Truth manufactured propaganda, and the Ministry of Plenty created shortages. On the enormous pyramidal structure of the Ministry of Truth hung the words:

“WAR IS PEACE. FREEDOM IS SLAVERY. IGNORANCE IS STRENGTH.”

“The official ideology abounds with contradictions even where there is no practical reason for them...These contradictions are not accidental.”

George Orwell, 1984

The purpose of this all-encompassing program of psychological warfare is to bewilder the mind of the average citizen. For when the citizen is bombarded with contradictions and lies and lives in what Orwell called “that shifting phantasmagoric world in which black may be white tomorrow and yesterday’s weather can be changed by decree”, he or she eventually ceases to know what to think, or even how to think. The distinction between up and down, fact and fiction, truth and falsity, is not only blurred, but loses significance. The belief in objective truth disappears, and the average citizen becomes completely dependent on authority figures to feed him ideas, and thus, is ready to assent to lies and to believe the most absurd things – so long as those in the political class deem it to be true.

The Soviet official Gyorgy Pyatakov explained that the “true Bolshevik”:

“...would be ready to believe that black was white, and white was black, if the Party required it...there was no particle left inside him which was not at one with the Party, did not belong to it.”

Gyorgy Pyatakov

In an essay titled *Totalitarianism and the Lie*, Leszek Kolakowski, a philosopher who was exiled from Poland for his criticisms of Communism and Marxism, wrote:

“This is what totalitarian regimes keep unceasingly trying to achieve. People whose memory—personal or collective—has been nationalized, has become state-owned and perfectly malleable, totally controllable, are entirely at the mercy of their rulers; they have been deprived of their identity; they are helpless and incapable of questioning anything they are told to believe. They will never revolt, never think, never create; they have been transformed into dead objects.”

Leszek Kolakowski, Totalitarianism and the Lie

In 1984, the main character Winston manages for most of the book to stand psychologically outside the grasp of the Party, and its leader Big Brother, despite the widespread fear and mental disorientation which swirls around him. “Down with Big Brother”, he writes in his diary, early in the book. However, after being arrested by the Thought Police and subjected to “re-education”, Winston abdicates his reason and conscience and begins to accept the lies. He joins the totalitarian cult and becomes another brick in the wall of the all-powerful state. Referring to Winston, Orwell writes:

“He could not fight against the Party any longer. Besides, the Party was in the right...It was merely a question of learning to think as they thought...The pencil felt thick and awkward in [Winston’s] fingers. He began to write down the thoughts that came into his head. He wrote first in large clumsy capitals: FREEDOM IS SLAVERY. Then almost without a pause he wrote beneath it: TWO AND TWO MAKE FIVE...the struggle was finished. He had won the victory over himself. He loved Big Brother.”

George Orwell, 1984

Some have taken this ending as sign of Orwell’s pessimism, as an indication that humanity is doomed to a totalitarian future. Yet Orwell’s motive for writing this book was not to depress nor promote a fatalistic apathy, but to warn and rouse to action as many people as possible. For Orwell understood as well as anyone that in the battle between totalitarianism and freedom, no one can afford to stand aside. The fate of each and every one of us hangs in the balance.

“Don’t let it happen. It depends on you.”

George Orwell



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“Monsters exist, but they are far too few in number to be truly dangerous; the most dangerous monsters are ordinary [men and women] ready to believe and obey without asking questions.”

Primo Levi, The Truce

Is a peaceful and prosperous society dependent on strict obedience to the laws and dictates of the state? Is voting the only proper means to show displeasure with the commands of politicians and bureaucrats? While school systems and the mainstream media try to indoctrinate us with an obedient mindset and while politicians desire an almost blind obedience from the populace, history tells a different story about the value of always doing what we are told. In this video we are going to discuss why obedience, not disobedience, is the greatest threat to mankind, while also examining how civil disobedience keeps a society free.

“The problem is not disobedience, it is obedience.”

Howard Zinn, Civil Obedience is the Problem

“The real question is not to know why people rebel, but why they don’t rebel.”

Wilhelm Reich

While the Grimke sisters, famous for their work with the abolitionist and woman’s suffrage movements of the 19th century, put it this way:

“The doctrine of blind obedience and unqualified submission to any human power, whether civil or ecclesiastical [i.e., religious], is the doctrine of despotism.”

Sarah Grimke, Angelina Grimke “On Slavery and Abolitionism: Essays and Letters”

In the 20th century as millions upon millions of bodies piled up in socialist and fascist countries it became evident to all those who cared to look that obedience can kill. In the Soviet Union, Nazi Germany, Cambodia, China and North Korea, it was not rebellion or a disregard for law that sent hundreds of millions to an early death but the fact that in such countries people obeyed too much. They obeyed laws that were immoral and they accepted commands from politicians and bureaucrats that were socially destructive. The horrific experiences in these countries taught us a very important lesson, but one that has quickly been forgotten: sometimes it is obedience, not disobedience that is the true crime, or as Peter Ustinov wrote in a 1967 article in the New Yorker:

“For centuries, men were punished for having disobeyed. At [the Nazi trials of] Nuremberg, for the first time, men were punished for having obeyed. The repercussions of this precedent are only now beginning to make themselves felt.”

Peter Ustinov, New Yorker

But even if laws that lead to the suffering of innocent people and to the destruction of a society should be disobeyed, this proves very difficult after a country has descended into full-blown totalitarianism. For with totalitarianism comes an enslavement of the population. First an enslavement of the minds of the masses through incessant propaganda and then a physical enslavement through mass surveillance, police forces and a judicial system whose main job is to keep people in a state of submission. Under these oppressive conditions of the all-powerful centralized state, disobedience takes a heroic act of the will as stepping out of line can easily be paid for with one's life. What makes disobedience even more challenging under totalitarianism is that when the state controls all, economic activity grinds to a halt. This leads to shortages in life's necessities, and when one is hungry, finding food, not resisting tyranny, is front of mind, or as Theodore Dalrymple explains:

“In [totalitarianism] shortages of material goods, even of necessities, were not a drawback but a great advantage for the rulers. These shortages were not accidental to the terror, but one of its most powerful instruments. Not only did shortages keep people's minds strictly on bread and sausage, and divert their energies to procuring them so that there was no time or inclination left over for subversion, but the shortages meant that people could be brought to inform, spy and betray each other very cheaply. . .”

Theodore Dalrymple, The Wilder Shores of Marx: Journeys in a Vanishing World

Disobedience, therefore, is not an antidote to full-blown tyranny. Disobedience rather is a preventative measure to tyranny. But to be effective at returning freedom to a society at risk of losing it, disobedience must endure widespread support, it must in other words take the form of civil disobedience. When an individual practices disobedience in a solitary manner this is referred to as dissidence or conscientious objection. Civil disobedience, on the other hand, occurs when a group of people disobey and in a public manner. This act of mass non-compliance sends a message that no politician wants to hear: the people no longer fear them, no longer respect them and will no longer obey them. The current form of governance has been deemed no longer acceptable and in contrast to a protest whereby a populace asks for its freedom back, with civil disobedience a populace begins to take its freedom back, or as Murray Rothbard explains:

“...mass non-violent resistance as a method for the overthrow of tyranny, stems directly from...the fact that all rule rests on the consent of the subject masses... For if tyranny...

rests on mass consent, then the obvious means for its overthrow is simply by mass withdrawal of that consent. The weight of tyranny would quickly and suddenly collapse under such a non-violent revolution.”

Murray Rothbard, Intro to Politics of Obedience

But how can enough people be awakened to the necessity of disobeying laws that are socially destructive? What, in other words, leads to a movement of civil disobedience that can defeat tyranny? One possible tactic is to use reason, logic and argumentation to make the masses aware of the deceptions, lies and manipulations which are being used to herd them into totalitarianism. This approach is based on the notion that if the truth were presented and the propaganda deconstructed most people would rise up in defiance and cast off their chains. But an appeal to reason and evidence only works on minds that are open and receptive and when tyranny is rising ever fewer minds exist in this state. Rather fear, confusion, anger and uncertainty run rampant and these emotions can easily trump the power of reason.

“The mass crushes out the insight and reflection that are still possible within the individual. . .Rational argument can be conducted with some prospect of success only so long as the emotionality of a given situation does not exceed a certain critical degree. If the affective temperature rises above this level, the possibility of reason’s having any effect ceases and its place is taken by slogans and chimerical wish-fantasies. That is to say, a sort of collective possession results which rapidly develops into a psychic epidemic.”

Carl Jung, Civilization in Transition

This observation that a people can become immune to logic and reason was shared by the writer Elie Wiesel who upon visiting the Soviet Union wrote:

“Logic will not help you here. You have your logic, they have theirs, and the distance between you two cannot be bridged by words.”

Elie Wiesel

What is needed more than words and arguments are individual dissidents who act as the motivating examples for the larger movements of civil disobedience. For the power of example always reigns supreme in its ability to influence others. When people see that someone is willing to take risks in defence of their beliefs, and that their words are congruent with their actions, this lends more credence to their position. And while the example of a dissident may not awaken those most blind to the chains of control that are being placed around them, it can exert a strong influence on the many who are on the fence as to what to think and how to act. But without an intrepid few willing to be the example for others a sort of prisoner’s dilemma exists: no one is willing to be the first to disobey, and so everyone sits idly by hoping that others will save society for them:

“So many others are better qualified, more competent and effective than me. A throng of good-willed souls is projected onto the horizon, ready to rise, so that I can retreat more easily: another will act instead of me, and so much better.”

Frederic Gros, Disobey

But the question that a potential first-mover faces is when is it right to disobey? For while it is relatively easy to disobey when a movement of civil disobedience has gained momentum, the initial dissenters face a challenging predicament. Is disobedience worth the risk? Has the act of obedience reached such immoral proportions that to be compliant is to be complicit in the destruction of society and in the harming of innocent life? Each person must answer these questions for them self but an answer usually comes from within, as a command from conscience:

“The etymology of the word “conscience” tells us that it is a special form of “knowledge” . . .The peculiarity of “conscience” is that it is a knowledge of, or certainty about, the emotional value of the ideas we have concerning the motives of our actions.”

Carl Jung, Civilization in Transition

Conscience is a felt state, it is an intuitive form of knowledge about the rightness or wrongness of an action. One of history’s most famous examples of an individual who relied on his conscience to direct him in acts of disobedience is Socrates. Socrates was commanded by the Thirty Tyrants to arrest an innocent man and to bring him to his death. Socrates, however, did not practice blind obedience even if the commands came from tyrants who held the power of life and death over him. Socrates instead listened to his conscience:

“. . .the Thirty sent for me” says Socrates “. . .and ordered [me] to bring Leon the Salaminian to be put to death. . .I, however, showed again, by action, not in word only, that I did not care a whit for death. . .but that I did care with all my might not to do anything unjust or unholy... For that government, with all its power, did not frighten me into doing anything unjust...I simply went home.”

Plato, The Apology

In going about our day-to-day life our conscience tends to speak quietly and often the messages it sends are ambiguous. But this can be used to one’s advantage when making the decision as to whether disobedience has now become the right choice. For as Jung points out while many of life’s moral dilemmas only elicit a whisper from our conscience there are times when our conscience speaks so loudly and clearly that it almost seems to be the voice of a god or as Jung writes in *Civilization in Transition*:

“Since olden times conscience has been understood by many people less as a psychic function than as a divine intervention; indeed, its dictates were regarded as...the voice of God. This view shows what value and significance were, and still are, attached to the phenomenon of conscience. . .Conscience. . .commands the individual to obey his inner voice even at the risk of going astray.”

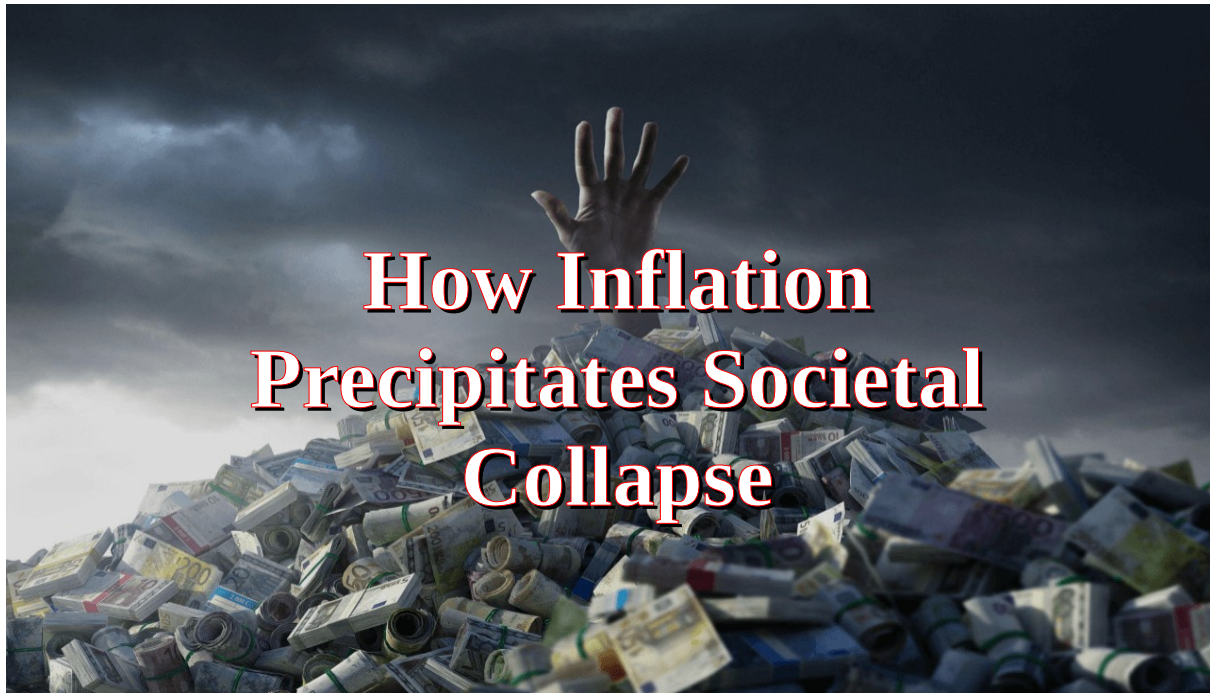
Carl Jung, Civilization in Transition

If our conscience commands us to stop obeying unjust laws and if each time we do obey we experience feelings of loathing and guilt, then we face a difficult choice: we either obey our conscience and become a dissident or we continue to obey the commands of tyrants and we become a traitor to our self. The men and women whose inner voice speaks loudest in the face of a rising tyranny are those most likely to step forward as dissidents and it is when a common vibration of conscience rings out through a society that civil disobedience becomes possible. First the call of conscience is answered by a relative few, but these few serve as the example for others. Whether

enough people will follow to create a movement of civil disobedience is contingent on how much a populace still desires freedom compared to what degree the populace has been psychologically subdued by the fear, hate and confusion that is sown by the propaganda of tyrants. If, however, tyranny comes knocking in the society in which we live and if our conscience then issues the command that we stop being complicit in the crime of obedience we should keep in mind the following comment by Henry David Thoreau:

“Disobedience is the true foundation of liberty. The obedient must be slaves.”

Henry David Thoreau, Civil Disobedience



“...if inflation is not eliminated very soon, all our technological and scientific improvements will not prevent us from a tremendous financial catastrophe that will destroy practically all that civilization has created in the last several hundred years.”

Ludwig von Mises, Ludwig von Mises on Money and Inflation

The philosopher George Santayana stated that “Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it”, and in the modern day we are committing a massive economic blunder which has brought ruin to countless past societies. Central banks are inflating our money supplies at rates that could bring about the collapse of our economy and pull-down civilization with it. And in this video, using the example of Rome, we will explore the destructive effects of a policy of inflation.

“No matter how modest or benign it may seem at first, an inflationary policy is...always [fatal] in the long run. It has been tried many times and has always failed. It does not solve the problems of the society; it aggravates them and leads inexorably on toward self-destruction.”

William Ophuls, Immoderate Greatness: Why Civilizations Fail

Inflation is defined in several ways. Some use it to refer to a rise in the general level of prices, or what can be called price inflation, others use it to refer to an increase in the supply of money issued by a government or a central bank, which is called monetary inflation. For the purpose of this video, we are going to concentrate on the latter phenomenon as monetary inflation leads to price inflation

and so can be considered the more primary phenomenon. Or as the 20th century economist Ludwig von Mises explains:

“Prices are going up because there is an additional quantity of money, asking, searching for a not-increased quantity of commodities. And the newspapers or the theorists call the higher prices, “inflation.” But the inflation is not the higher prices; the inflation is the new money pumped into the market. It is this new money that then inflates the prices.”

Ludwig von Mises, Ludwig von Mises on Money and Inflation

In the early Republic of Rome, the Roman State engaged in a policy of territorial expansion and with each conquest of a neighboring region the State plundered the defeated empire’s treasury and increased its own hoard. However, after suffering defeat against the Germans in 9 A.D., Emperor Augustus terminated the policy of expansion and the flow of wealth from foreign lands ceased. Augustus, and the emperors who followed, thus faced insufficient revenue. Taxes could only be raised so much without whipping up the sands of revolt, and so, as Joseph Tainter explains:

“When extraordinary expenses arose the supply of coinage was frequently insufficient. To counter this problem, Nero began in 64 A.D. a policy that subsequent emperors found increasingly irresistible.”

Joseph Tainter, The Collapse of Complex Societies

This policy involved debasing the value of the standard Roman silver coin, the denarius, by infusing it with cheap metals such as copper, and “clipping” both gold and silver coins, or in other words, reducing the size of them. The excess precious metal obtained from clipping and debasing coins was then used to create more coins, and with these newly minted coins the Roman State covered its debts and expenses and fattened the pockets of statesmen and political insiders.

The modern equivalent of this policy is the expansion of the supply of paper, or digital, money. However, whether one debases and clips coins in order to create more coins, prints more paper money, or adds digits to an account held with a central bank, the result is the same – monetary inflation. The quantity of money is increased, and all other things equal, this leads to price inflation and a rise in the cost of living.

During a monetary inflation the newly created money does not enter the economy in a uniform manner. It tends to first enter the economy through the hands of the politically connected. As these people and institutions are able to spend the newly created money before the monetary inflation drives up prices, they benefit from the inflation. Or as *Jesus Huerta de Soto* writes:

“The process [of monetary inflation] gives rise to a redistribution of income in favor of those who first received the new injections or doses of monetary units, to the detriment of the rest of society, who find that with the same monetary income, the prices of goods and services begin to go up.”

Jesus Huerta de Soto, Money, Bank Credit, and Economic Cycles

In ancient Rome the State took advantage of the delay between the debasement of the denarius and the market’s realization of its diminished value. It paid its debts and expenses with newly minted and debased coins, at prices that did not reflect the increase in the supply of money. In this way the political elite of Rome discovered a means to increase their spending, whenever they wanted,

without raising taxes. And so, following the example set by Nero, whenever an emperor faced a shortage of funds, sought to expand the military, institute a new project or program, or merely enlarge the State's treasury, he would debase and clip coins and increase the supply of money. And as Mises writes:

"If you want to study [inflation] today, go to a museum where they have coins minted in the past and see what happened to the silver coins of the ancient Roman Empire...And there you will see what governments did in order to profit by falsifying the system of money, by increasing illegally and against the wishes of the people, the quantity of money."

Ludwig von Mises, Ludwig von Mises on Money and Inflation

By the year 200 A.D., the denarius was debased to 50% of its original silver content, and the rising prices that followed became impossible to ignore. At this time the Roman State was, in the words of Harold Mattingly, "moving steadily in the direction of bankruptcy". And so, despite the rising prices, the State decided to try to maintain the illusion of prosperity by continuing with its policy of inflation. And as a result:

"By the latter part of the third century the currency was so worthless that the State resorted to forced labor... the State was so unable to rely on money to meet its needs that it collected its taxes in the form of supplies directly usable by the military and other branches of government, or in bullion to avoid having to accept its own worthless coins."

Joseph Tainter, The Collapse of Complex Societies

Referring to what happens to a society when its system of money is progressively destroyed by inflation, the American historian Otto Friedrich explained:

"If all money becomes worthless, then so does all government, and all society, and all standards."

Otto Friedrich, Before the Deluge

This breakdown in the social order was readily apparent in Ancient Rome. During the period between 235 and 284 A.D., groups of military deserters, whom the Roman State was unable to pay, roamed the countryside, pillaging small towns and farms. Barbarians sacked and burned towns, destroyed crops, stole cattle, and carried Romans away into slavery. The average reign for an Emperor was a few months, many Roman emperors were executed, and at one time 30 different men laid claim to the throne. Civil wars were common. The population declined. Lawlessness prevailed in what remained under Roman control.

"From barbarism to civilization requires a century; from civilization to barbarism needs but a day."

Will Durant, The Reformation: The Story of Civilization

In the attempt to deal with rapidly rising prices, in 301 A.D. the Emperor Diocletian made the mistake that so many politicians commit during an inflationary period. Refusing to acknowledge that rising prices were primarily driven by the State's policy of monetary inflation, he tried to solve

the problem by implementing price controls for goods such as wheat and other necessities. However, these price controls led to shortages, the ruin of merchants and the decimation of trade between the various regions of Rome. “*Sheer necessity led to the repeal of the law.*”, explained Lactantius, an advisor to the Emperor Constantine. At one point Diocletian considered restoring value to the coinage, but the State lacked sufficient stores of silver and gold. Faced with massive expenditures and an ever-growing debt, Diocletian, and the emperors who followed him, felt their hands to be tied and so continued onward with a policy of inflation.

“Just as when you start to use certain drugs you don’t know when to stop nor how to stop, it is the same with [inflation], the governments don’t know when nor how to stop.”

Ludwig von Mises, Ludwig von Mises on Money and Inflation

Due to the State’s prolonged policy of inflation, in the first half of the 4th century hyper-inflation kicked in. Joseph Tainter writes:

“In the second century a modius of wheat (approximately nine liters), during normal times, had sold for 1/2 denarius...the same modius of wheat sold in 335 A.D. for over 6000 denarii, and in 338 for over 10,000. In 324 the gold solidus was worth 4250 denarii, yet by 337 it was worth 250,000. By 363 the value stood at 30,000,000 denarii to the solidus.”

Joseph Tainter, The Collapse of Complex Societies

Whatever savings commoners held in denarii were reduced to a value of practically nothing. Those who could not pay their taxes were jailed, and so some families abandoned their homes and possessions or else sold their children into slavery.

“In talking about inflation, we should not forget that...there is the danger that depriving the masses of their savings will make them desperate...”

Ludwig von Mises, Ludwig von Mises on Money and Inflation

Farmers became dependent on their next harvest. Whatever crops were brought in were immediately sold to cover the cost of taxes. If barbarians raided, or if a drought or locusts destroyed their crops, they borrowed from neighbors, starved, or were jailed by the State.

“Under conditions of famine it was the farmers, amazingly enough, who were the first to suffer, often flocking to cities that held stores of grain.”

Joseph Tainter, The Collapse of Complex Societies

Due to increasing lawlessness, unrest and revolt, the political elite felt their power slipping away and so they grew desperate. Despite widespread poverty and famine, the State grew more authoritarian and continued to increase taxes and inflate the currency. However, by the 5th century, the peasantry was too decimated from prolonged State predation, and so, as Joseph Tainter writes:

“The advantage of empire declined so precipitously that many peasants were apathetic about the dissolution of Roman rule, while some actively joined the invaders...the Roman Empire lost both its legitimacy and its survivability...The empire could no longer afford the problem of its own existence.”

Joseph Tainter, The Collapse of Complex Societies

The story of Rome contains often neglected, but important lessons. One of these lessons is that when a government, or banking elite, claims the right to expand the supply of money without limits, it plays with a fire that can quickly spiral out of control and end in economic ruin, revolution, or even outright societal collapse.

The only way to protect against the dangers of a policy of monetary inflation is for the control of money to be taken out of the hands of governments and central banks. The interactions of people, voluntarily exchanging on the market, must beget forms of money which are widely used, and which cannot be manipulated by any man or institution. For as Mises wrote:

“Through a long evolution, governments, or certain groups of governments, have promoted the idea that money is not simply a market phenomenon, but that it is whatever the government calls money. But money is not what the government says... Money is the generally accepted and generally used medium of exchange; it is not something created by the government; it is something created by the people buying and selling on the market.”

Ludwig von Mises, Ludwig von Mises on Money and Inflation



How To Escape From A Sick Society

Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, reflecting on the Soviet Union's descent into totalitarian rule in the mid-20th century, and all the things that could have been done to prevent it, wrote the following:

“If...if... We didn't love freedom enough. And even more – we had no awareness of the real situation. . .we hurried to submit. We submitted with pleasure! ... We purely and simply deserved everything that happened afterward.”

Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, The Gulag Archipelago

The 20th century clearly shows that totalitarianism is not a solution to any problem, but a social ill of the most horrific kind. More innocent men, women, and children were killed by the totalitarian regimes of the 20th century than by natural disasters, pandemics or even the two world wars. If, therefore, we are unfortunate enough to be living in a world flirting with the sickness of totalitarianism, what can we do to escape? In this video, relying on the insights of those who studied, and lived under totalitarian rule, we are going to explore what is called a forward escape from the control of the cruel and twisted minds of would-be totalitarians.

To understand what this form of escape entails we will contrast it with two other ways to escape from the hardships of living through an attempted totalitarian takeover – the backward escape and the physical escape. The backward escape, entails dulling one's awareness of the reality and precariousness of one's situation through the use of drugs and alcohol or by zoning out in front of screens for hours on end. The backward escape can provide short-term relief to feelings of anxiety, depression and boredom, but the more one relies on such activities the more one's mental health deteriorates. Furthermore, the backward escape does nothing to prevent the rise of totalitarianism as it promotes docility, passivity, and apathy, all traits that make people more manipulable and controllable, or Dr. Joost Meerloo wrote in his book on totalitarianism:

“The cult of passivity and so-called relaxation is one of most dangerous developments of our times. Essentially, it represents a camouflage pattern, the double wish not to see the dangers and challenges of life and not to be seen. . .Silent, lonely relaxation with alcohol, sweets, [or] the television screen. . .may soothe the mind into a passivity that may gradually make it vulnerable to the seductive ideology of some feared enemy. Denying the danger of totalitarianism through passivity, may gradually surrender to its blandishments those who were initially afraid of it.

An alternative to backward escape, is the physical escape which is to relocate to a place that offers more freedom. This form of escape has many benefits, for given that we have one chance at life, why not live somewhere absent the stifling control of corrupt and power-hungry politicians and bureaucrats? But there are problems with this form of escape. Firstly, for many people it is not practical to pack up and move to a new land. Furthermore, if we live at a time when the rise of tyranny is a global phenomenon the practicality of the physical escape diminishes further, as the sought after pockets of freedom are few and far between. What is more, if totalitarianism is permitted to proliferate the places that are free now, may not remain so for long. Running away, like escaping backward, is not the ideal solution to the rise of totalitarianism, instead the solution is to escape forward into a new and better reality.

What does the forward escape entail? To answer this question we need to dispel with the notion that totalitarianism can be defeated through compliance. Many people cede to the commands of would-be totalitarians because they believe that so doing is the quickest means to return to some semblance of normality. But this is a cowardly and ignorant way to act. For compliance only emboldens totalitarian regimes, a point emphasized by the political philosopher Hannah Arendt in her book *The Origins of Totalitarianism*:

“...the most characteristic aspect of totalitarian terror [is that] it is let loose when all organized opposition has died down and the totalitarian ruler knows that he no longer need be afraid. . . Stalin started his gigantic purges not in 1928 when he conceded, “We have internal enemies,” . . . but in 1934 when all former opponents had “confessed their errors,” and Stalin himself, at the Seventeenth Party Congress . . . declared “...there is nothing more to prove and, it seems, no one to fight.””

Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*

Compliance is the food that feeds totalitarians. Compliance is not, and never will be, the path back to some form of normality. Rather non-compliance and civil disobedience are essential to counter the rise of totalitarian rule. But in addition to resistance, a forward escape into a reality absent the sickness of totalitarian rule requires the construction of a parallel society. A parallel society serves two main purposes: it offers pockets of freedom to those rejected by the totalitarian system, or who refuse to participate in it, and it forms the foundation for a new society that can grow out of the ashes of the destruction wrought by the totalitarians. Or as Václav Havel, a dissident under the communist rule of Czechoslovakia, explains in his book *The Power of the Powerless*:

“When those who have decided to live within the truth have been denied any direct influence on the existing social structures, not to mention the opportunity to participate in them, and when these people begin to create what I have called the independent life of society, this independent life begins, of itself, to become structured in a certain way.

“You wait for one great shocking occasion, thinking that others, when such a shock comes, will join with you in resisting somehow... But the one great shocking occasion, when tens or hundreds or thousands will join with you, never comes. . . If the last and worst act of the whole regime had come immediately after the first and smallest, thousands, yes, millions would have been sufficiently shocked ... But of course this isn't the way it happens. In between comes all the hundreds of little steps, some of them imperceptible, each of them preparing you not to be shocked by the next... And one day, too late, your principles, if you were ever sensible of them, all rush in upon you. . . and you see that everything – everything – has changed... Now you live in a world of hate and fear, and the people who hate and fear do not even know it themselves; when everyone is transformed, no one is transformed...”

Milton Mayer, They Thought They Were Free. . . [these] parallel structures do not grow . . . out of a theoretical vision of systemic change (there are no political sects involved), but from the aims of life and the authentic needs of real people.”

Václav Havel, The Power of the Powerless

There are innumerable ways to contribute to the construction of a parallel society. One can build technologies that promote freedom or agoristic economic institutions that further voluntary exchange. One can run a business that resists implementing unjust laws or mandates, or one can create media or educational institutions that counter the lies and propaganda of the state. Or one can create music, literature or artwork that counters the staleness of totalitarian culture. The parallel society is a decentralized and voluntary alternative to the centralized and coercive control of the totalitarian society and as Havel explains:

“One of the most important tasks the ‘dissident movements’ have set themselves is to support and develop [parallel social structures]. . . What else are those initial attempts at social self organization than the efforts of a certain part of society to . . . rid itself of the self-sustaining aspects of totalitarianism and, thus, to extricate itself radically from its involvement in the [totalitarian] system?”

Václav Havel, The Power of the Powerless

And as he explains further:

“...it would be quite wrong to understand the parallel structures and the parallel [society] as a retreat into a ghetto and as an act of isolation, addressing itself only to the welfare of those who had decided on such a course...The ultimate phase of this process is the situation in which the official structures...simply begin withering away and dying off, to be replaced by new structures that have evolved from ‘below’ and are put together in a fundamentally different way.”

Václav Havel, Living in Truth

The construction of a parallel society, however, is not merely a long-term solution to totalitarian destruction, but also serves to counter the rise of totalitarian rule. For the act of building parallel social structures reveals that not everyone will just roll over and submit to total state control and as was noted by Hannah Arendt, this helps keep the would-be totalitarians in check. This process also counters the social atomization that comes with totalitarian rule by promoting voluntary communal bonds between those who cherish freedom. And as an added benefit, for those who partake in this process, it can serve as a healthy vehicle to escape the day-to-day feelings of anxiety, boredom and depression that accompany living in a world teetering with a descent into totalitarianism. For if we pick a goal to help in the construction of the parallel society, and work towards it in a disciplined and focused manner, we give our life more meaning and we open up the possibility of attaining the peak experiential states of flow and Rausch.

Flow is an optimal state of consciousness “*in which attention is so narrowly focused on an activity that a sense of time fades, along with the troubles and concerns of day-to-day life.*” (*Natasha Dow Schüll, Addiction by Design*) Rausch, on the other hand, is the word Nietzsche used for a peak cognitive state similar to flow.

“*What is essential in Rausch is the feeling of increased strength and fullness.*”

Nietzsche, Twilight of the Idols

Rausch is an emergent by-product of focused attempts to effectuate real-world change and when in Rausch, as in flow, we perform at our best, or as John Richardson explains in *Nietzsche’s New Darwinism*:

“In Rausch the organism feels its capacities at a peak, and takes pleasure in this heightened potency. These capacities are drives to work on the world, and in Rausch one feels oneself “overfull” with them, bursting to change things to fit oneself.”

John Richardson, Nietzsche's New Darwinism

Both flow and Rausch are healthy ways to escape from the day-to-day miseries of living in a sick and corrupted society. Unlike the numbing experiential zones of the backward escape which weaken us in body and mind, flow and Rausch strengthen us and increase our feelings of power. The more people who experience flow and Rausch the harder it is for those in power to herd a populace into the chains of totalitarian servitude and as Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn warned:

“No weapons, no matter how powerful, can help the West until it overcomes its loss of willpower.”

Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, A World Split Apart

To attempt the forward escape by contributing to the creation of a parallel society and in the process attaining the states of flow and Rausch comes with risks, and success is not guaranteed, but it is a far better option than merely sitting passively by just hoping things will get better.

“Hope in reality is the worst of all evils because it prolongs the torments of man”

Nietzsche, Human all too Human

In place of mere hope, courageous action from as many people as possible is needed to prevent the rise of totalitarian rule. And the sooner people act in defiance of would-be totalitarians, the greater the chance of success. For the mistake that was made over and over again in the totalitarian countries of the 20th century was that people didn't act soon enough. Milton Mayer, in his book *They Thought They Were Free*, interviews an individual who lived through Hitler's rule and his words should serve as a warning for those who live in a world at risk of being engulfed by the life-destroying machinery of totalitarian rule:

“You wait for one great shocking occasion, thinking that others, when such a shock comes, will join with you in resisting somehow... But the one great shocking occasion, when tens or hundreds or thousands will join with you, never comes. . . If the last and worst act of the whole regime had come immediately after the first and smallest, thousands, yes, millions would have been sufficiently shocked ... But of course this isn't the way it happens. In between comes all the hundreds of little steps, some of them imperceptible, each of them preparing you not to be shocked by the next... And one day, too late, your principles, if you were ever sensible of them, all rush in upon you. . . and you see that everything – everything – has changed...Now you live in a world of hate and fear, and the people who hate and fear do not even know it themselves; when everyone is transformed, no one is transformed...”

Milton Mayer, They Thought They Were Free



ACADEMY of IDEAS

FREE MINDS FOR A FREE SOCIETY



“Since ultimately people heal themselves with or without the tool of psychotherapy, why is it that so few do and so many do not? Since the path of spiritual growth, albeit difficult, is open to all, why do so few choose to travel it? It was to this question that Christ was addressing himself when he said, “Many are called, but few are chosen.””

M. Scott Peck, The Road Less Traveled

No matter the current state of our life or the problems we face, we all have the capacity for self-transformation, the ability to overcome our problems, and to move towards the ideal of peak psychological health. Yet most of us do not exercise this capacity; rather, we leave our personal problems unsolved and stay stuck in a mediocrity that situates us far below our potential and places us at risk of mental illness. Why is this limiting life-path the norm? In this video, drawing from the insights of the psychiatrist M. Scott Peck, we examine this question and explore how we can be one of the few who proceeds upon the path of personal growth – which Peck called “the road less traveled”.

“Life is difficult. This is a great truth, one of the greatest truths....Most do not fully see this truth that life is difficult. Instead they moan more or less incessantly, noisily or subtly, about the enormity of their problems, their burdens, and their difficulties as if life were generally easy, as if life should be easy...Life is a series of problems. Do we want to moan about them or solve them?”

M. Scott Peck, The Road Less Traveled

One of the primary marks of wisdom is the capacity to accept that life is difficult, problems inevitable, and suffering inescapable. A second mark of wisdom is the understanding that if we confront our problems and work to solve them, we will suffer, but it will be the type of suffering that is meaningful and promotive of personal growth. Many of us do not possess these marks of wisdom. Rather, we cling to the illusory hope that if only we can make enough money, meet the right person, or get the right job, then life will be easy. Many of us also try to evade our problems

via a variety of avoidance tactics. We blame our problems on other people or social circumstances. We procrastinate, hoping our problems will disappear. We engage in self-deception and deny that we have problems, or we turn to alcohol, drugs, or compulsive technology use to escape awareness of our problems and to numb the suffering that accompanies them. And as Peck observed:

“Some of us will go to quite extraordinary lengths to avoid our problems and the suffering they cause, proceeding far afield from all that is clearly good and sensible in order to try to find an easy way out, building the most elaborate fantasies in which to live, sometimes to the total exclusion of reality...We attempt to skirt around problems rather than meet them head on. We attempt to get out of them rather than suffer through them.”

M. Scott Peck, The Road Less Traveled

This attempt to avoid our problems and find an easy way out of suffering is doomed to fail. Not only does it lead us into fantasies and delusions, but it exacerbates our problems and makes us susceptible to a meaningless and neurotic type of suffering that is central to many forms of mental illness. Or as M. Scott Peck explained:

“This tendency to avoid problems and the emotional suffering inherent in them is the primary basis of all human mental illness...In the succinctly elegant words of Carl Jung, “Neurosis is always a substitute for legitimate suffering.” But the substitute itself ultimately becomes more painful than the legitimate suffering it was designed to avoid. The neurosis itself becomes the biggest problem. True to form, many will then attempt to avoid this pain and this problem in turn, building layer upon layer of neurosis...when we avoid the legitimate suffering that results from dealing with problems, we also avoid the growth that problems demand from us. It is for this reason that in chronic mental illness we stop growing, we become stuck.”

M. Scott Peck, The Road Less Traveled

There is only one way out of the neurotic suffering of mental illness, and this is to endure the legitimate suffering that is part and parcel of accepting our problems and then actively working to solve them. To heighten our capacity to endure suffering, it is beneficial to remember that suffering is not our enemy, but the greatest of teachers. “*Those things that hurt, instruct.*”, as Benjamin Franklin put it. Or as the ancient Greek tragedian Aeschylus observed 2500 years ago: *The gods have ordained a solemn decree that from suffering alone comes wisdom.*” When we stop fleeing from and numbing ourselves to our suffering, then suffering shows us where we are going wrong in life and opens our eyes to the full extent of our problems and the necessity of change. This is why M. Scott Peck labeled depression as a healthy symptom which only becomes pathological when we try to suppress it and evade the life changes that its presence is calling for. Or as Peck explained:

“...depressive symptoms are a sign to the suffering individual that all is not right with him or her and major adjustments need to be made...depression is a normal and basically healthy phenomenon.”

M. Scott Peck, The Road Less Traveled

A further benefit of enduring suffering, instead of avoiding or masking it, is that eventually there comes a time when we grow sick of suffering and are struck by an intense motivation to resolve, once and for all, the problems underlying it. Once we cross this “threshold of suffering”, it typically

becomes easy to leave behind bad habits and self-sabotaging behaviors, and to cultivate the discipline needed to move in a life-promoting direction. The philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche used this threshold of suffering as a catalyst to eradicate some of his most harmful habits, and as he wrote:

“Indeed, from the bottom of my soul I am gratefully disposed to all my misery and sickness...because such things leave me a hundred back-doors through which I can escape from permanent [bad] habits.”

Nietzsche, The Gay Science

If suffering motivates us to confront our bad habits and problems, we will then have to struggle and suffer in order to overcome them. But in contrast to neurotic suffering which breeds stagnation and a wasted life, this type of suffering is constructive as it leads to personal growth. Or as Peck observed:

“It is through the pain of confronting and resolving problems that we learn...it is in this whole process of meeting and solving problems that life has its meaning....Problems call forth our courage and our wisdom; indeed, they create our courage and our wisdom. It is only because of the pain of problems that we grow mentally and spiritually.”

M. Scott Peck, The Road Less Traveled

It is because legitimate suffering is a great teacher and a spur to personal growth that M. Scott Peck observed that: “...wise people learn not to dread but actually to welcome problems and actually to welcome the pain of problems.” Two of the wisest figures in history, Buddha and Jesus, harnessed the pain inherent in their problems to ascend to an elevated level of consciousness that was marked not only by a profound capacity to endure suffering, but also to experience overflowing joy. Or as Peck explained:

“One measure—and perhaps the best measure—of a person’s greatness is the capacity for suffering. Yet the great are also joyful. This, then, is the paradox. Buddhists tend to ignore the Buddha’s suffering and Christians forget Christ’s joy. Buddha and Christ were not different men. The suffering of Christ letting go on the cross and the joy of Buddha letting go under the bo tree are one.”

M. Scott Peck, The Road Less Traveled

But it is not just the tendency to avoid the pain of our problems that locks us in a mediocre and mentally ill life. It is also our laziness – for as the psychologist Marie-Louise von Franz wrote:

“When people try to evade problems you first have to ask if it is not just laziness. Jung once said, “Laziness is the greatest passion of mankind, even greater than power or sex or anything.””

Marie Louise von Franz, The Way of the Dream

M. Scott Peck defined laziness as “the force of entropy as it manifests in the lives of us all.” In the external world entropy is the tendency of systems to degenerate into a disordered and stagnant state; while in the inner world of the psyche it is the force of laziness that breeds disorder and stagnation.

Laziness is so common and pervasive that Peck called it the one and only original sin, or as he wrote:

“For many years I found the notion of original sin meaningless, even objectionable... Gradually, however, I became increasingly aware of the ubiquitous nature of laziness... original sin does exist; it is our laziness. It is very real...Some of us may be less lazy than others, but we are all lazy to some extent. No matter how energetic, ambitious or even wise we may be, if we truly look into ourselves we will find laziness lurking at some level. It is the force of entropy within us, pushing us down and holding us all back from our spiritual evolution.”

M. Scott Peck, The Road Less Traveled

Many will protest that they are not lazy as they work long hours and devote their limited free time to doing chores, spending time with friends and family, and resting. But as Peck notes, “*laziness takes forms other than that related to the bare number of hours spent on the job or devoted to one’s responsibilities to ‘others.’...A major form that laziness takes is fear.*” (*M. Scott Peck, The Road Less Traveled*) Although many of us give lip service to wanting to change, grow, succeed, and perhaps even attain greatness, we often fear personal development more than we desire it, simply because of the immense amount of work and effort that is required. This intimate connection between fear and laziness is why the mind unconsciously devises ingenious ways to justify laziness; as but one example, we tell ourselves that our laziness is not really laziness, but merely the drive to relax and enjoy life – a type of refined hedonism. Or as Peck writes:

“In the earlier stages of spiritual growth, individuals are mostly unaware of their own laziness...This is because the lazy part of the self, like the devil that it may actually be, is unscrupulous and specializes in treacherous disguise. It cloaks its own laziness in all manner of rationalizations, which the more growing part of the self is still too weak to see through easily or to combat.”

M. Scott Peck, The Road Less Traveled

Friedrich Nietzsche also identified laziness as an entropic psychological force which exhibits devil-like qualities, and he recommended a joyful approach to overcoming it. When we see through our rationalizations and become aware of our laziness, instead of feeling guilty, we should laugh at it in the recognition that it is an innate part of human nature. And then we should remind ourselves that true happiness is not found in maximizing time spent in passive leisure activities, rather, it is a byproduct of voluntary effort in the service of personal growth and meaningful goals. In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Nietzsche called the entropic force of laziness “the spirit of gravity”, and as he wrote:

“And when I saw my devil, I found him serious, thorough, profound, solemn: he was the spirit of gravity – through him all things are ruined. Not by wrath, but by laughter do we slay. Come, let us slay the spirit of gravity! I learned to walk; since then I have run. I have learned to fly: since then I do not have to be pushed in order to move. Now I am nimble, now I fly, now I see myself under myself, now a god dances within me.”

Nietzsche, Thus Spoke Zarathustra

Enduring the legitimate suffering that accompanies confronting and solving personal problems and exerting a joyful self-willed effort in the quest to override the original sin of laziness, is the road less traveled and the way to escape the mediocrity and mental illness that is so rampant in our age. Some may find this advice to be too general and desire a more specific and personalized plan for overcoming their problems, but as Peck cautions:

“There are many who, by virtue of their passivity, dependency, fear and laziness, seek to be shown every inch of the way and have it demonstrated to them that each step will be safe and worth their while. This cannot be done. For the journey of spiritual growth requires courage and initiative and independence of thought and action. While the words of the prophets...are available, the journey must still be traveled alone. No teacher can carry you there. There are no preset formulas.”

M. Scott Peck, The Road Less Traveled



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“Good does not become better by being exaggerated, but worse, and a small evil becomes a big one through being disregarded and repressed. The shadow is very much a part of human nature, and it is only at night that no shadows exist.”

Carl Jung, Psychology and Religion

Carl Jung stressed that an individual's proper goal is wholeness, not perfection. The path to a greater character, to a more effectual approach to life, lies in integrating those elements of our psyche that for too long have been repressed and denied – the elements that make up what Jung called our unconscious shadow side. What is it that most people deny and repress into their shadow? All that is deemed bad or immoral by society, all that is frowned upon by our family or peers, all the traits that when initially expressed were ridiculed, shunned, or met with punishment.

But given that no moral code is perfect and no family or peer group is ideal, in adapting to the social world we not only repressed destructive elements of our personality such as our unbridled sexuality, anger and untamed animal impulses, but we also repressed positive and life promoting characteristics. Perhaps our assertiveness was frowned upon, our early attempts at creativity ridiculed, or maybe our competitiveness or ambition was felt by those close to us to be a threat. As a result of repressing elements of our personality into our shadow we were made tame, obedient, predictable – perhaps likeable – but at the cost of our vitality and psychological wholeness. In this video, we are going to explore how to integrate our shadow, and analyze the connection between our shadow and greatness of self. For as Edward Whitmont wrote:

“The shadow, when it is realized, is the source of renewal...When there is an impasse, and sterile time in our lives, despite an adequate ego development – we must look to the dark, hitherto unacceptable side which has been at our conscious disposal.”

Edward Whitmont, Meeting the Shadow

To begin, we must examine how our “dark, hitherto, unacceptable side” can be a key to unlock our potential. For doesn’t conventional wisdom warn us that our dark side consists of a wickedness we need to overcome? But the connection between the integration of our shadow and the development of a greater character becomes clear when we understand Jung’s assertion that the integration of the shadow leads to self-reliance.

“...this integration [of the shadow]...leads to disobedience and disgust, but also to self-reliance, without which individuation is unthinkable.”

Carl Jung, Psychology and Religion

In becoming aware of the shadow, first as an intellectual concept, and then via introspection and reflection we seek to discover what our own personal shadow consists of, we awaken to a moral conflict, to the troubling idea that a portion of our personality is at odds with contemporary morality and with what our family, peers, and society judge as good and evil. In the attempt to protect our personality, this recognition can motivate us to take a stance with Nietzsche “beyond good and evil”, and to examine the morality we have been socialized into. In undergoing such an examination, we are likely to discover how much hypocrisy, complacency, and fear underlies many of the moral injunctions we obey, and furthermore, that ridicule and moral condemnation are often driven by envy. In response to this realization, we may feel the need to behave in ways less in line with the dominant moral code of our day, ways considered “evil” by social morality. It is not that we want to become “evil” in the sense of turning criminal or committing heinous acts against our fellow man, but “evil” in the sense of detaching ourselves from what we see as the flaws our moral code so we can reconnect with the parts of our personality we lost in our shadow long ago. As Erich Neumann, a student of Jung’s, explained:

“The psychological analysis of any normal development will make it clear that, if he is to grow up, it is not merely unavoidable but actually essential that the individual should do and assimilate a certain amount of evil, and that he should be able to overcome the conflicts involved in this process. The achievement of independence involves the capacity of the ego not only to adopt the values of the collective but also to secure the fulfillment of those needs of the individual which run counter to collective values – and this entails doing evil.”

Erich Neumann, Depth Psychology and a New Ethic

Most people are horrified at the thought of questioning, or heaven forbid, breaking the moral code they were socialized into. They believe the value judgments good and evil imposed on them by their schooling, parents, peers, and society, are written into the fabric of reality itself. They do not understand that a morality, like a society, can be sick and in need of overcoming. And so, for the common man and woman the existence of the shadow poses too great a threat to their fragile self-image, a self-image that was constructed over years of adjusting to who they thought others expected and wanted them to be. But in never mustering up the courage to confront the elements of one’s shadow it does not go away. Rather, it puts one in the unfortunate position of susceptibility to possession by its destructive side, to following in the tragic footsteps of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. For in public, most people are conscientious, moral, and moderate. But behind closed doors and in the comfort of hearth and home, their shadow at times turns them into marionettes – unconscious victims of addictions, strange compulsions, fits of irrational anger, and myriad of other, self-destructive behaviors.

“Man has to realize that he possesses a shadow which is the dark side of his own personality...if only for the reason that he is so often overwhelmed by it.”

Erich Neumann, Depth Psychology and a New Ethic

Or as Carl Jung warned:

By not being aware of having a shadow, you declare a part of your personality to be non-existent. Then it enters the kingdom of the non-existent, which swells up and takes on enormous proportions...If you get rid of qualities you don't like by denying them, you become more and more unaware of what you are, you declare yourself more and more non-existent, and your devils will grow fatter and fatter.”

Carl Jung, Dream Analysis: Notes of the Seminar Given in 1928-1930

As denying our shadow only renders us prone to possession by its destructive side, integrating our shadow into our conscious personality is crucial for our well-being. To gain some insight regarding how to do this, we are going to focus on the integration of one shadow characteristic many of us desperately need to integrate: that being, our aggression. In modern society, the word aggression typically stimulates thoughts of violence and destruction. In other words, we focus only on one side of the aggressive coin. For there is a healthy form of aggression that is imperative not only to our psychological health, but our survival. This form of aggression fuels our sense of self-ownership, emboldens us in the face of fear, and ignites the drive to explore and master the world outside us and within.

“Aggression is not necessarily destructive at all.” wrote the psychoanalyst Clara Thompson. “It springs from an innate tendency to grow and master life which seems to be characteristic of all living matter. Only when this life force is obstructed in its development do ingredients of anger, rage, or hate become connected with it.

Clara Thompson, Interpersonal Psychoanalysis

Unfortunately, for many of us the life force of aggression was obstructed throughout our development. Our displays of aggression, whether constructive or otherwise, were not met with encouragement or understanding, but frowns, punishment, and even violence. And so, to adapt to our environment and minimize conflict, we learned to repress our aggression into our shadow side, and thereafter became susceptible to anger, rage, and hate. Based on decades of experience with patients, the psychotherapist Alexander Lowen observed that:

“Many individuals have an unconscious murderous rage which they feel they must keep buried out of fear of its destructive potential...Such rage is like an unexploded bomb which one dares not touch.”

Alexander Lowen, Joy

If we have repressed our aggression into our shadow, how can we integrate it in a way that alleviates our anger and propels us towards wholeness and greatness of character? The following passage provides some pertinent warnings and clues:

“There is no generally effective technique for assimilating the shadow. It is more like diplomacy or statesmanship and it is always an individual matter. First one has to accept

and take seriously the existence of the shadow. Second, one has to become aware of its qualities and intentions. This happens through conscientious attention to moods, fantasies and impulses. Third, a long process of negotiation is unavoidable.”

Daryl Sharp, Jung Lexicon

After we take seriously the existence of the shadow, we next need to pay close attention to our moods and fantasies. Do we experience a simmering anger for no apparent reason? Maybe we have recurring fantasies born of resentment, bitterness, self-hate – the desire for destruction or revenge? In either case, it is likely we have not adequately integrated our aggression into our conscious personality. To initiate this integration process, we can seek safe, controlled, and productive outlets within which we start acting with more aggression. The most obvious outlet is to find a competitive sport, martial art, or exercise regime whereby we can begin to reconnect to our aggressive instincts. But we can also, for example, work on becoming more assertive in our behavior, more decisive in our choices, more declarative and protective of our personal boundaries, or more inclined to stand our ground when tested by our co-workers, family, or peers. As Jung explained:

“...this integration [of the shadow] cannot take place and be put to a useful purpose unless one can admit the tendencies bound up with the shadow and allow them some measure of realization – tempered, of course, with the necessary criticism.”

Carl Jung, Psychology and Religion

As we undergo this process, we need to be careful not to overcompensate in our behavior.

“Of all evil I deem you capable:” wrote Nietzsche. “Therefore I want the good from you. Verily, I have often laughed at the weaklings who thought themselves good because they had no claws.”

Nietzsche, Thus Spoke Zarathustra

For the goal in integrating our aggression is not to become a bad person, but to get in touch with the repressed energies and potentials needed to sculpt a great and powerful character. We want to become capable of acting with force, not to be forceful; potentially dangerous, not a violent criminal; able to stand up for ourselves and what we believe in, not vicious and mean.

If we can extrapolate the integration method just outlined, and use it to integrate other shadow characteristics – perhaps those tied to our sexuality, our creativity, our ambition or desire for power – we will start to notice our personality transform in a myriad of dramatic ways. We will become more grounded, more secure in our skin, more independent in our moral judgments, more courageous and self-reliant. In short, in integrating our shadow we will move towards the ideal of psychological wholeness and this is the ideal that produces the greatness of character that is sorely missing in this modern world.

“The acceptance of the shadow involves a growth in depth into the ground of one’s own being...a new depth and rootedness and stability is born.”

Erich Neumann, Depth Psychology and a New Ethic



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“Either we have no dreams or our dreams are interesting. We should learn to arrange our waking life the same way: nothing or interesting.”

Nietzsche, The Gay Science

The chance of living a good life is increased by attaining success in two main areas. Firstly, we need to make money, as poverty is limiting and acts as a barrier to many of life’s great experiences. Secondly, we need to consistently take part in challenging, but intrinsically rewarding activities. In this video we are going to explore how we can achieve the uncommon success of getting it right in both these areas. We are going to examine, in other words, how we can cultivate an intrinsically rewarding and financially lucrative career.

What keeps this form of success uncommon are three main factors or what can be called the defining weaknesses of our generation. The first of these weaknesses is a lack of purpose. Most people drift through life and fail to harness the power of effective goal setting. The second weakness is a proclivity for laziness and an inability to overcome procrastination, perfectionism, self-doubt, and complacency. And the third weakness is our generation’s ever-shrinking attention spans and the tendency to distraction. If we counteract these weaknesses, we will be one of the few for whom uncommon success is destiny.

The first step toward uncommon success, therefore, is to counteract the first generational weakness by setting some goals. For goals, by giving us something to aim at, act as the loadstones on the path to uncommon success.

“Without some goal and some effort to reach it no man can live.”

Fyodor Dostoyevsky, Prison Life in Siberia

In his book *The Art of Impossible: A Peak Performance Primer*, Steven Kotler suggests that to achieve great things, we need three types of goals. Firstly, we need an overarching purpose to our life. This is the goal of a lifetime. But as we are striving for uncommon success our purpose must meet two criteria: firstly, the activities that lead to its accomplishment must be intrinsically rewarding, and secondly, it must offer the potential for financial rewards. If our choice does not meet the first criteria, we will succumb to inertia at the first sign of difficulty, and if it does not meet the second criteria, it can only ever remain a hobby. For some of us, choosing a purpose is easy as we know exactly what our calling is, but for others exploration and experimentation in various fields is necessary to discover what we like and what we are good at.

After discovering a purpose, the next step is to break it down to the scale of what the Kotler, in *The Art of Impossible*, calls high, hard goals. High, hard goals are the major accomplishments required to move us in the direction of our purpose. If, for example, our purpose is to become a successful musician, a high hard goal would be to produce an album. In setting these goals, we want them to be big enough to be motivating, but not so big that we set ourselves up for inevitable failure, for as Nietzsche warned:

“The talent of many a man appears less than it is because he always sets himself too great tasks.”

Nietzsche, Human all too Human

With a realistic, but ambitious goal, our next step is to break it down into the bitesize pieces Kotler calls clear goals. Clear goals give direction to our day-to-day life and as Kotler explains:

“...[clear goals] are all the tiny, daily steps it takes to accomplish [our] mission. They exist over much smaller timescales. Becoming a great writer is a [life’s] purpose. ...Writing a novel is the next level down, a high, hard goal that could take years to complete. Writing 500 words between 8:00 A.M. and 10:00 A.M.—now, that’s a clear goal.”

Steven Kotler, The Art of Impossible

With a set of clear goals, the next step is to put in the consistent, day-to-day, work that is needed to execute on these goals. Towards this end, we must counteract the second of our generation’s great weaknesses: namely the tendency to succumb to laziness and to be thwarted by what the author Stephen Pressfield calls the force of resistance. What is resistance? Resistance, explains Pressfield:

“...is our tendency ...to yield to procrastination, self-doubt, fear, impatience, self-inflation, self-denigration, distraction, laziness, arrogance, complacency, and perfectionism.”

Steven Pressfield, Put Your Ass Where Your Heart Wants to Be

Defeat resistance and our chance of uncommon success is high, allow resistance to defeat us and we are destined to remain trapped in mediocrity. So how is resistance defeated? The title of Pressfield’s 2022 book states the solution clearly: To defeat resistance we should “put our ass where our heart wants to be.” We should, in other words, locate ourselves, day in and day out, in the physical location, where our work gets done. If a writer, this means every day we sit at our desk, if a musician, at our instruments, or if a web entrepreneur, at our computer. In addition to locating

ourselves in the physical place of our work, we also need to place our hands on our tools – be it picking up our pencil or guitar, or placing our fingers on a keyboard. For as the cognitive scientist and author Guy Claxton explains in his book *Intelligence in the Flesh*:

“[We have] this inbuilt tendency to lock our attention on to objects that are [in] or near our hands . . . [and] it is hard for us to shift our attention away from such objects to something else.”

Guy Claxton, Intelligence in the Flesh

Occupying the space where our work gets down, and gripping our tools, only requires moving our muscles and so can be accomplished by all but the laziest among us. But when we place ourselves in this physical location, with tool in hand, we greatly increase the chance that we will do some work and so defeat resistance.

“When I sit down to write in the morning, I literally have no expectations for myself or for the day’s work. My only goal is to put in three or four hours with my fingers punching the keys. I don’t judge myself on quality. I don’t hold myself accountable for quantity. The only questions I ask are, Did I show up? Did I try my best? If I’ve done that, then I’ve put my butt where my heart wants to be. I can’t ask anything of myself more than that.”

Steven Pressfield, Put Your Ass Where Your Heart Wants to Be

Defeating resistance is furthered by committing to our purpose mentally and emotionally. This means to think of ourselves as the artist, writer, entrepreneur, or athlete, we wish to become, for as the poet William Blake wrote: “*As a man is, so he sees*”. Integrating our life’s purpose into our self-concept will lead to a new way of attending to the world. We will notice inspirations and ideas for our work that otherwise would have escaped our attention and these inspirations can be a motivating force to help keep us consistent in our efforts.

“Attention changes the world. How you attend to it changes what it is you find there. What you find then governs the kind of attention you will think it appropriate to pay in the future.”

Iain McGilchrist, The Matter with Things

One form of attending to the world that is essential for uncommon success is distraction free concentration and this leads us to the third weakness we must counteract – namely, a short attention span. We need to learn how to fully engage in our work by focusing on single tasks for extended periods of time. Those who cultivate this skill produce a greater quality and quantity of output, or as the author Robert Greene writes in his book *Mastery*:

“It is better to dedicate two or three hours of intense focus to a skill than to spend eight hours of diffused concentration on it. You want to be as immediately present to what you are doing as possible.”

Robert Greene, Mastery

One way to improve our ability to focus, is to dramatically decrease the use of smart phones and social media. It is well established that these technologies are addictive, a prime source of distraction and that extended use of them significantly diminishes our ability to concentrate, and as Oliver Burkeman explains in *Four Thousand Weeks*:

“[Smart phones and the social media industry] is essentially a giant machine for persuading you to make the wrong choices about what to do with your attention, and therefore with your finite life, by getting you to care about things you didn’t want to care about. And you have far too little control over your attention simply to decide, as by fiat, that you’re not going to succumb to its temptations. “

Oliver Burkeman, Four Thousand Weeks

Without being bombarded by alerts, notifications and the addictive pull of endless feeds of video, pictures, and text, it is much easier to remain in a state of distraction free concentration while doing our work. If we find our attention span is short, we can exercise this mental muscle by devoting 15-20 minutes sessions focused on a single task and then gradually increase the length of these sessions.

“Performance psychologists have extensively studied how [long distraction-free focus] can be sustained by an individual in a given day. In their seminal paper on deliberate practice, Anders Ericsson and his collaborators survey these studies. They note that for someone new to such practice, an hour a day is a reasonable limit. For those familiar with the rigors of such activities, the limit expands to something like four hours, but rarely more.”

Cal Newport, Deep Work

If we reach these upper limits of distraction free focus, we will possess a rare and valuable skill. If we put this skill to work in executing on our goals, uncommon success will be within our grasp. But an important question remains: Should we quit our day job and fully devote ourselves to the pursuit of uncommon success? Or should we adopt what is called the hobbyist approach and initially pursue our calling in our spare time and wait to quit our job until the financial success becomes more certain?

While there are costs and benefits to both approaches the hobbyist approach may be more realistic. For if we quit our job immediately, unless we have deep pockets, we place a deadline on our ability to pursue our calling. Once we run out of money, our energy will have to shift to finding a new job and this may lead us to cut corners and make poor choices in the need to attain quick financial rewards. For this reason, many who have attained uncommon success recommend the hobbyist approach, or as Kotler writes:

“I was a bartender for the first decade of my writing career, which allowed me the time to develop my craft without the terror of having to pay my bills off the results. This was critical to my success. This is also why Tim Ferriss tells entrepreneurs to start out with a hobbyist approach to their first start-up: nights and weekends. Curiosity into passion; passion into purpose; and purpose into patient profit—that’s the safest way to play this game.”

Steven Kotler, The Art of Impossible

The cumulative effects of pursuing a purpose in this hobby-like manner can be immense, for as Pressfield writes:

“One hour a day is seven hours a week, thirty hours a month, 365 hours a year. Three hundred and sixty hours is nine forty-hour weeks. Nine forty-hour weeks is a novel. It’s two screenplays, maybe three. In ten years, that’s ten novels or twenty movie scripts. You can be a full-time writer, one hour a day.”

Steven Pressfield, Put Your Ass Where Your Heart Wants to Be

So, should we make the effort of finding a purpose, setting goals that move us in its direction, fighting resistance and cultivating the focus that leads to uncommon success? Or should we just remain on the safe and easy path of a mediocre and boring 9-5 job? In answering this question, we should recognize that for some people this is not merely a question of an easy life, versus one of risk and hard work, for some this is a question of sickness versus health, or even life versus death, for as Pressfield writes:

“How many of us have become drunks and drug addicts, developed tumors and neuroses, succumbed to pain killers, gossip, and compulsive cell phone use, simply because we don’t do that thing that our hearts, our inner genius, is calling us to?”

Steven Pressfield, The War of Art



“Most people can never, even for a moment, disentangle themselves from the restraints imposed by those around them, nor can they disregard their approval. From the moment they begin to understand their parents’ smiles and frowns they have needed the moment to moment approval of everyone, even strangers...These people measure their entire worth by what others think of them.”

Richard Taylor, Restoring Pride

Most of us care too much about what other people think of us. We value social approval too highly and we possess an irrational fear of disapproval, criticism, and rejection. Instead of forging a path through life that aligns with our talents, strengths and desires, we conform to the wants and expectations of others. Some of us even let our dreams die because we fear how we will be judged if we pursue them. In this video, we are going to explore how we can diminish an excessive need for social approval and overcome the life-inhibiting fear of social disapproval.

“I have never wished to satisfy the crowd; for what I know, they do not approve, and what they approve, I do not know.”

Epicurus, Quoted in Seneca, Epistles

A useful first step to cultivating a healthier attitude to the opinions of others is to reflect on the character of the individuals whose approval we seek. Are such individuals deserving of our respect and admiration? Are they flourishing or stagnating? Do they possess courageous, independent, and inquisitive minds capable of seeking the truth and forming and voicing their own opinions? Or are they cowardly conformists who uncritically accept and regurgitate whatever it is they are told by the mainstream news, celebrities, social media personalities, and politicians? If an individual does not impress us, why should we care if our way of life impresses them?

“Why do you take pleasure in praise from those you cannot praise yourself?”

Seneca, Epistles

Or as Arthur Schopenhauer echoed:

“What goes on in other people’s consciousness is, as such, a matter of indifference to us; and in time we get really indifferent to it, when we come to see how superficial and futile are most people’s thoughts, how narrow their ideas, how mean their sentiments, how perverse their opinions, and how much of error there is in most of them.”

Arthur Schopenhauer, The Wisdom of Life

Conditioning ourselves to be indifferent to the approval of a single individual is one thing. However, when in the presence of a group, or crowd of people, the need for approval can be especially strong, and sometimes this need manifests as a social anxiety that cripples our capacity to flourish. When giving a speech or performance, we grow tense and jittery and unable to perform to the best of our ability. At social gatherings we are awkwardly self-conscious and unable to act with natural spontaneity. And worst of all, the social anxiety that lies behind an excessive need for the approval of groups inhibits us from following our conscience; even when we know what we are saying or doing is wrong, we sheepishly follow the crowd.

According to the stoic philosopher Epictetus, to tame this social anxiety we should reflect on the nature of a crowd. For as Epictetus stated regarding the individual who is socially anxious:

“...he doesn’t know what a crowd is, or the applause of a crowd...what the praise of the mass of people is, and what value it holds in life, these are things that he neither knows nor has ever studied. So here he is bound to tremble and turn pale.”

Epictetus, Discourses, Fragments, Handbook

Most people relate to a crowd as if it were an entity in its own right, and so naturally they grow intimidated by its presence. However, in reality a crowd is nothing more than a collection of individuals gathered in one location or else united by a common sentiment. When in the presence of a crowd if we train ourselves to see and relate to single individuals, rather than to the crowd as a whole, it is much easier to diminish an anxious need for approval. For just as we should be indifferent to the approval of a single individual who we do not respect, the same applies to a collection of individuals who happen to be congregated together. Or as the Roman philosopher and statesman Cicero wrote:

“What could be more absurd than to suppose the same ignorant and common people you despise, when taken one by one, are of any greater consequence when taken together?”

Cicero, Tusculan Disputations

In some cases, however, a group or crowd is composed of individuals with impressive minds and admirable characters. Yet even in such a situation, what such individuals think of us is not in our control, and so it should not be our concern. All we can do is carry ourselves with integrity and try to refrain from doing anything that is deserving of disdain, and then gracefully accept whatever opinions they form of us. Or as Epictetus stated:

“No good man grieves or groans, no one wails, no one turns pale and trembles and says, “How will he receive me, how will he listen to me?” Slave, he will act as he sees fit. Why do you care about other people’s business?”

Epictetus, Discourses

Along with tempering our need for social approval, overcoming the fear of disapproval, ridicule, and rejection is also life-promoting. We need to be able to maintain a state of calm indifference when attacked by the stings of other people’s scorn – be it online or in the real world. Epictetus advised that when we are the target of another’s contempt, the first thing we should do is pause and allow ourselves to take a breath before we react, as immediate or reflexive reactions are often self-defeating. If we take a moment to compose ourselves, we will be free to choose a response that is appropriate to the situation.

“Human freedom involves our capacity to pause between the stimulus and response and, in that pause, to choose the one response toward which we wish to throw our weight.”

Rollo May, The Courage to Create

Or as Epictetus observed:

“Remember that you are insulted not by the person who strikes or abuses you but by your opinion that these things are insulting. So whenever another provokes you... try above all...not to allow yourself to be carried away by the impression; for if you delay things and gain time to think, you’ll find it easier to gain control of yourself.”

Epictetus, Enchiridion

One of the more powerful ways to respond to insults or ridicule is to “listen like a stone”. This involves reacting to the person as a stone would react. In other words, it is to not react at all. We let their words fall on deaf ears, go about our business, and pretend the other person does not exist. This response is effective for two reasons. Firstly, when someone insults or ridicules us, one of the things they want is to provoke a reaction. They want to feel their words have power over us. In listening like a stone, we refrain from satisfying their will to power and show them, by doing nothing, that their provocations are petty and not able to move us. Secondly, as our thoughts and emotions are influenced by our actions, in reacting like a stone we become stone-like internally:

“It is the mark of a great mind to rise above insults; the most humiliating kind of revenge is to treat your adversary as not worth taking revenge upon...The great and noble are those who, like a lordly beast, listen unmoved to the barking of little dogs.”

Seneca, On Anger

Or as Epictetus explained:

“What does it mean...to be abused? Go up to a stone and subject it to abuse; what effect will you produce? Well then, if you listen like a stone, what will anyone who abuses you be able to achieve?”

Epictetus, Discourses

Another strategy is to respond to contempt with humor. Humor diffuses the tension of the situation; it shows the other person we are not going to lower ourselves to their level and respond to their vileness in kind, nor feed the flames of their anger. An especially witty remark can even turn an enemy into a friend. But perhaps most importantly, humor breeds power – as it is the mark of the powerful to be amused by those who are mistreating them. Or as Seneca observed:

“Some are offended if a hairdresser jostles them; they see an insult in the surliness of a doorkeeper, the arrogance of an attendant, the haughtiness of a valet. What laughter such things should draw! With what satisfaction should your mind be filled when you contrast your own peace of mind with the unrest into which others blunder!”

Seneca, On the Constancy of the Wise Man

The philosopher Diogenes was a master at the art of using humor to sweeten his dealings with disagreeable people. When insulted by a bald man Diogenes responded: “*I’ll not insult you in return, but simply congratulate your hair for having taken flight from such an evil head.*” Another time someone informed him that a fellow philosopher was speaking badly of him, and so Diogenes replied: “*That’s nothing to wonder at, since he’s never learned to speak well.*” When heckled by a group of men, Diogenes yelled back “*Come over here, men!*” As they approached, Diogenes casually dismissed them by saying “*I called for men, not scum!*”

Occasionally, however, the humor we use should be directed at ourselves. For sometimes insults contain kernels of truth. Rather than showing offence to insults that hit the mark, we are far better off recognizing that, like everyone else, we have flaws, quirks, foibles, and blind spots that can and should be the object of humor. If we stop taking ourselves so seriously and develop a healthy humility, then we can laugh *with* the person who is laughing at us, and thus ruin his or her attempts to disturb us. The French philosopher Montaigne wrote that a worthy goal is “*to be equally laughable and able to laugh*” (*Montaigne, Essayes*). Seneca observed that: “*No one is laughable who can laugh at himself.*” (*Seneca, On the Firmness of the Wise Man*) While Epictetus stated:

“If you hear that someone has spoken ill of you, do not make excuses about what was said, but answer: “Evidently he didn’t know about my other faults, or he wouldn’t have spoken only of the ones he did.”

Epictetus, Enchiridion

Ultimately, however, the greatest antidote to caring too much about what people think of us, is to cultivate confidence in ourselves. If we are insecure and plagued by feelings of inferiority, we will be slavishly dependent on the approval of other people, and forever fearful of their scorn. If, on the other hand, we focus our time and energy on strengthening mind and body, improving our character, achieving our goals, and sculpting a life to be proud of, then what others think of us – be it good or bad – will dwindle into the realm of insignificance. Or as Epictetus stated:

“If you are ever tempted to look for outside approval, realize that you have compromised your integrity. If you need a witness, be your own.” (*Enchiridion*)

Epictetus, Enchiridion



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“This is precisely the risk modern man runs: he may wake up one day to find that he has missed half his life.”

Carl Jung, Practice of Psychotherapy

Psychotropic drugs have become one of the most common forms of treatment for anxiety disorders and depression. But these drugs are not very good at curing people and often they just become crutches for lifelong psychological cripples. Fortunately, there are alternative ways to treat anxiety and depression. In this video we are going to turn to Carl Jung, one of history’s greatest psychiatrists, for drug-free advice on how to find a cure to these psychological disorders.

“... the elite still cling firmly to the notion that [anxiety] disorders originate in alterations within the brain. Unfortunately many run-of-the-mill doctors still swear by this gospel to the detriment of their patients, whom our age produces in swarms. Nearly all these patients have been convinced by the medical dogma that their sickness is of a physical nature.”

Carl Jung, The Symbolic Life

Jung believed that most cases of anxiety and depression are not the product of a faulty brain, but of a faulty way of life. The first step in Jung’s method of treatment, therefore, was not a drug prescription, but a dose of psychological insight – insight regarding what to expect from life and insight into what it takes to change. With respect to the former, Jung noted that many people believe that life should be easy, suffering kept to a minimum and difficulties avoided. But Jung would be blunt with his patients telling them that life is not easy, and comfort and peace are not our natural state. Or as Jung wrote:

“In the last resort it is highly improbable that there could ever be a therapy that got rid of all difficulties. Man needs difficulty; they are necessary for health. What concerns us here is only an excessive amount of them.”

Carl Jung, Structure and Dynamics of the Psyche

Accepting that difficulties are inevitable and nothing worth achieving comes easy, places us on the firm ground of reality from which to change. For when we accept that life is hard, we will also realize that only through a strengthened character do we have any chance of living a good life. If, on the other hand, we remain caught in the delusion that life should be easy, we will be less motivated to overcome a weak character, as we will falsely hope that if we just give it time life will get easier.

“Life is a battleground. It always has been, and always will be; and if it were not so, existence would come to an end.”

Carl Jung, Man and His Symbols

There is another piece of psychological insight that Jung saw as crucial for his patients to understand – namely, that our problems exist in the present and that present problems are not solved by digging into our past. Many people like to believe that only when they have determined why they are the way they are, can they move forward in life. But Jung believed that an excessive fixation on the past was merely an avoidance tactic used to evade the difficult task of facing up to what needs to be done now.

“People should know that not only the neurotic, but everyone, naturally prefers never to seek the causes of any inconvenience in himself, but to push them as far away from himself as possible in space and time. Otherwise he would run the risk of having to make a change for the better. Compared with this odious risk it seems infinitely more advantageous either to put the blame on to somebody else, or, if the fault lies undeniably with oneself, at least to assume that it somehow arose of its own accord in early infancy.” (V7)

Carl Jung, Two Essays on Analytical Psychology

With these doses of psychological insight, Jung would turn to the first actionable step in his method of treatment; and this was to help his patients face up to what he called the shadow, for as he writes:

“...the first requisite of any thorough psychological method, [is] for consciousness to confront its shadow.”

Carl Jung, Mysterium Coniunctionis

The shadow is Jung’s term for the elements of our character that we deny, and force into the unconscious, due to shame, insecurity, or censure. It is, in other words, the side of our personality we wish to hide from others, as well as from ourselves.

“...there can be no doubt that man is, on the whole, less good than he imagines himself or wants to be. Everyone carries a shadow, and the less it is embodied in the individual’s conscious life, the blacker and denser it is.”

Carl Jung, Psychology and Religion

Jung believed that facing up to the shadow was crucial in the process of self-change for several reasons. Firstly, we do ourselves no favours by denying the inferior parts of our personality, we merely lose control of how, and when, these traits emerge. If, on the other, hand we acknowledge a character flaw we can learn how to control its expression and so minimize the damage it does in our life, or as Jung explains:

“Anything conscious can be corrected, but anything that slips away into the unconscious is beyond the reach of correction and, its rank growth undisturbed, is subject to increasing degeneration. Happily, nature sees to it that the unconscious contents will irritate into consciousness sooner or later and create the necessary confusion.”

Carl Jung, Mysterium Coniunctionis

But the shadow is not only made up of weakness, rather some elements of it are strengths which we repressed in our youth because our peers, family members, or society at large, gave us the false impression that these traits were bad. Some people, for example, repress the ability to express anger or the ability to stand up for themselves. Another benefit of becoming conscious of the shadow, therefore, is that we gain access to life-promoting character traits, or as Jung writes:

“. . .the shadow is merely somewhat inferior, primitive, unadapted, and awkward; not wholly bad. It even contains . . .qualities which would in a way vitalize and embellish human existence, but convention forbids!”

Carl Jung, Psychology and Religion

One way to become conscious of the shadow is to observe the weaknesses, flaws, and insecurities of those close to us. For not only do most of us repress similar character traits, but we also tend to project elements of our shadow onto other people. If, therefore, we pay attention to which character traits of our friends and family bother us, we may also gain a glimpse of our own shadow. In addition to observing others, another way to bring the shadow into the light of consciousness is to reflect on the motives for our actions, especially actions we are ashamed of, and to be open to self-criticism when it is warranted. For as Jung notes, often the only thing that is preventing us from seeing our shadow is the ability to be honest with ourselves: “*With a little self-criticism one can see through the shadow*” (*Carl Jung Aion*).

Along with becoming more conscious of the shadow, another integral aspect of Jung’s method of treatment was helping his patients find a meaning to their lives. For Jung believed that when stuck in a deep depression, or consumed by an anxiety disorder, to be cured necessitates discovering a “*role as one of the actors in the divine drama of life*” (*Carl Jung, The Symbolic Life*). To understand what was meant by this we can turn to an encounter Jung had with a chief of the Pueblo tribe in the first half of the 20th century. Jung was discussing with this man the traditions of his tribe when the chief made the following remark:

“Yes, we are a small tribe, and these Americans, they want to interfere with our religion. They should not do it, because we are the sons of the Father, the Sun. He who goes there”; (pointing to the sun) – “that is our Father. We must help him daily to rise over the horizon and to walk over Heaven. And we don’t do it for ourselves only: we do it for America, we do it for the whole world.” (V18)

Carl Jung, The Symbolic Life

Jung understood that to many in the modern day this statement would sound crazy and archaic. But as he further notes the members of this tribe did not suffer like we suffer. They were not infected by neuroses, anxiety disorders, or depression. They did not fill themselves with pills each day, and they were not debilitated by addictions. Rather this tribe was composed of highly functioning individuals who saw themselves as fulfilling their duty as an actor in the divine drama of life, and their lives were rich in meaning and purpose. Or as Jung wrote:

“These people have no problems. They have their daily life, their symbolic life. They get up in the morning with a feeling of their great and divine responsibility: they are the sons of the Sun, the Father, and their daily duty is to help the Father over the horizon – not for themselves alone, but for the whole world. You should see these fellows: they have a natural fulfilled dignity.”

Carl Jung, The Symbolic Life

Jung contrasts this way of life, with a Western woman he met. This lady, as Jung notes, was a compulsive traveller, always running from one place to the next, always seeking, but never really finding what she was looking for.

“I was amazed when I looked into her eyes – the eyes of a hunted, a cornered animal – seeking, seeking, always in the hope of something. . . She is possessed . . . And why is she possessed? Because she does not live the life that makes sense. Hers is a life utterly, grotesquely banal. . . with no point in it at all. If she dies today, nothing has happened, nothing has vanished – because she was nothing!”

Carl Jung, The Symbolic Life

This compulsive seeking infects many in the Western world. Some run from one destination to another, some chase romantic partners, others are compulsive seekers of money, prestige, fame, or recognition on social media. But whatever the outward form it takes, the underlying motivation is the same – the seeker is trying to run away from the banality of their existence. They are seeking to fill the void of emptiness that comes from living a meaningless life. But as Jung explains this void cannot be filled with things, or even experiences, what fills this void is knowing that we are living in a way that makes a difference, or as he writes concerning the woman he met:

“But if she could say, “I am the daughter of the Moon. Every night I must help the Moon, my Mother, over the horizon” – ah, that is something else! Then she lives, then her life makes sense, and makes sense in all continuity, and for the whole of humanity. That gives peace, when people feel that they are living [as] actors in the divine drama. That gives the only meaning to human life; everything else is banal and you can dismiss it. A career, producing of children, are all maya compared with that one thing, that your life is meaningful.”

Carl Jung, The Symbolic Life

Jung was not suggesting that we all adopt the Puebloan mythology, rather his point is that many people suffer because their life makes no sense. And the task for those who want to be free of anxiety or depression is to discover this sense. We must, in other words, find a way to justify our existence, so that we, like the Puebloan, can believe that our life is meaningful. For some this can be accomplished through religion, for others by contributing in a substantial way to the promotion of

values such as justice, freedom, or community, while others will find it through the creative act. But for those of us in the modern West, where we lack a dominant mythology, it is up to us, and us alone, to discover how we can play a meaningful role in the divine drama of life. For the few who accomplish this task, a fulfilling life will define their future, for the many who don't, years or decades of pointless suffering and compulsive seeking will be their fate.

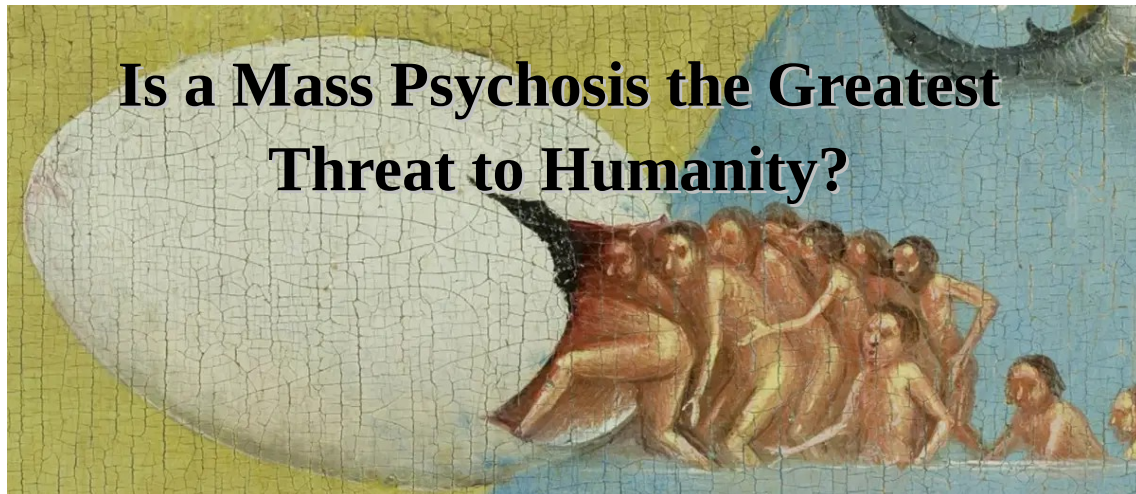
“I am only concerned with the fulfilment of that which is in every individual, . . . That is the whole problem; that is the problem of the true Pueblo: that I do today everything that is necessary so that my father can rise over the horizon.”

Carl Jung, The Symbolic Life



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Is a Mass Psychosis the Greatest Threat to Humanity?

“All one’s neighbours are in the grip of some uncontrolled and uncontrollable fear. . . In lunatic asylums it is a well-known fact that patients are far more dangerous when suffering from fear than when moved by rage or hatred.”

[Carl Jung, Psychology and Religion](#)

According to the psychologist Carl Jung the greatest threat to civilization lies not with the forces of nature, nor with any physical disease, but with our inability to deal with the forces of our own psyche. We are our own worst enemies or as the Latin proverb puts it “Man is wolf to man”. In *Civilization in Transition* Jung states that this proverb “*is a sad yet eternal truism*” and our wolf-like tendencies come most prominently into play at those times of history when mental illness becomes the norm, rather than the exception in a society, a situation which Jung termed a psychic epidemic.

“Indeed, it is becoming ever more obvious” he writes “that it is not famine, not earthquakes, not microbes, not cancer but man himself who is man’s greatest danger to man, for the simple reason that there is no adequate protection against psychic epidemics, which are infinitely more devastating than the worst of natural catastrophes.”

Carl Jung, The Symbolic Life

In this video we are going to explore the most dangerous of all psychic epidemics – the mass psychosis. A mass psychosis is an epidemic of madness and it occurs when a large portion of a society loses touch with reality and descends into delusions. Such a phenomenon is not a thing of fiction. Two examples of mass psychoses are the American and European witch hunts of the 16th and 17th centuries and the rise of totalitarianism in the 20th century. During the witch hunts

thousands of individuals, mostly women, were killed not for any crimes they committed but because they became the scapegoats of societies gone mad:

“In some Swiss villages, there were scarcely any women left alive after the frenzy had finally burned itself out.”

Frances Hill, A Delusion of Satan

The totalitarian experiments of the 20th century are a more recent, and a more deadly, example of a mass psychosis. In countries such as the Soviet Union, Nazi Germany, North Korea, China and Cambodia it was a collective detachment from reality and a descent into delusions and paranoia that permitted the rise of the all-powerful totalitarian governments that destroyed the lives of hundreds of millions:

“. . .the totalitarian systems of the 20th century represent a kind of collective psychosis. Whether gradually or suddenly, reason and common human decency are no longer possible in such a system: there is only a pervasive atmosphere of terror, and a projection of “the enemy,” imagined to be “in our midst.” Thus society turns on itself, urged on by the ruling authorities.”

Joost Meerloo, The Rape of the Mind

When a mass psychosis occurs the results are devastating. Jung studied this phenomenon thoroughly and wrote that the individuals who make up the infected society “*become morally and spiritually inferior*” they “*sink unconsciously to an inferior... intellectual level*” they become “*more unreasonable, irresponsible, emotional, erratic, and unreliable,*” and worst of all

“Crimes the individual alone could never stand are freely committed by the group [smitten by madness].”

Carl Jung, The Symbolic Life

What makes matters worse is that those suffering from a mass psychosis are unaware of what is occurring. For just as an individual gone mad cannot step out of his mind to observe the errors in his ways, so too there is no Archimedean point from which those living through a mass psychosis can observe their collective madness, or as Jung writes concerning the psychic epidemic that swept through Germany under Hitler’s rule:

“The phenomenon we have witnessed in Germany was nothing less than [an] outbreak of epidemic insanity. . . No one knew what was happening to him, least of all of the Germans, who allowed themselves to be driven to the slaughterhouse by their leading psychopaths like hypnotized sheep.”

Carl Jung, After the Catastrophe

But what gives rise to a mass psychosis? And what makes a society susceptible to this devastating phenomenon? For an answer we must begin at the basics. We must explain what is meant by a psychosis and what leads an individual into a state of madness. With this information we can then examine how this process plays out on a mass scale.

A psychosis can be defined as a detachment from reality or the loss of an adaptive relationship to reality. In place of thoughts and beliefs that conform to the facts of the world the psychotic becomes overrun by delusions which are false beliefs considered to be true despite the existence of evidence that proves the contrary. Delusion, writes Joost Meerloo can be defined as

“...the loss of an independent, verifiable reality, with the consequent relapse into a more primitive stage of awareness.”

Joost Meerloo, The Rape of the Mind

Delusions can take many forms. Some psychotics develop delusions of paranoia and believe they are constantly being followed, tracked and observed. Others, such as catatonic schizophrenics, develop delusions about their ability to alter the state of the universe merely with the movement of their body and so remain constricted in statue like poses. But while delusions are false in the sense of not conforming to the facts of the external world, they are considered true to the psychotic and so influence how they interact with the world and with other people, or as Jung writes:

“If a man imagined that I was his arch-enemy and killed me, I should be dead on account of mere imagination. Imaginary conditions do exist and they may be just as real and just as harmful or dangerous as physical conditions. I even believe that psychic disturbances are far more dangerous than epidemics [of physical disease] or earthquakes.”

Carl Jung, Psychology and Religion

While a descent into the delusions of a psychosis has many triggers such as an excessive use of drugs or alcohol, brain injuries and other illnesses, these physical causes will not concern us here. Our concern is with psychological, or what are called psychogenic triggers, as these are usually what lead to the mass psychosis. The most prevalent psychogenic cause of a psychosis is a flood of negative emotions, such as fear or anxiety, that drives an individual into a state of panic. When in a state of panic one naturally seeks relief as it is too mentally and physically draining to subsist in this hyper-emotional state for a prolonged period of time. To escape the fear and anxiety of the panic state a positive or negative reaction can take place and the positive reaction takes the following form:

“A greater effort is called forth. The individual will show more strength and will-power and will try to overcome the obstacle or the cause of misery through physical, intellectual, and moral effort. . If the strength of one individual is not sufficient he will seek the help of others. . If such an ultimate attempt fails, or if an individual is too weak from the start to show fight, then a negative reaction takes place.”

Carl Jung, Psychology and National Problems

At the extreme, the negative reaction is a psychotic break. A psychotic break is not a descent into a state of greater disorder as many believe, but a re-ordering of one's experiential world which blends fact and fiction, or delusions and reality, in a way that helps end the feelings of panic. Silvano Arieti, one of the 20th century's foremost authorities on schizophrenia, explains the psychogenic steps that lead to madness: firstly there is

“...[the] phase of panic – when the patient starts to perceive things in a different way, is frightened on account of it, appears confused, and does not know how to explain “the strange things that are happening.”

Silvano Arieti, Interpretation of Schizophrenia

The next step is what Arieti calls a phase of psychotic insight, whereby an individual “

“...succeeds in “putting things together” [b]y devising a pathological way of seeing reality, [which allows him] to explain his abnormal experiences. The phenomenon is called “insight” because the patient finally sees meaning and relations in his experiences. . .”

Silvano Arieti, Interpretation of Schizophrenia

But the insight is psychotic because it is based on delusions not on adaptive and life-promoting ways of relating to whatever threats precipitated the panic. The delusions, in other words, allow the panic-stricken individual to escape from the flood of negative emotions, but at the cost of losing touch with reality and for this reason Arieti says that a psychotic break can be viewed as “*an abnormal way of dealing with an extreme state of anxiety. . .*” The American psychologist Alexander Lowen echoes this sentiment:

“Two factors are important [in the dynamics of a psychotic break]:” he writes “one is an ego that is weak or insecure. . The other factor is a flood of feeling that cannot be integrated by the ego.”

Alexander Lowen, The Voice of the Body

When it is understood that a flood of negative emotions, in conjunction with a weak and insecure sense of self, can trigger a descent into madness it becomes clear how a mass psychosis can occur. A population first needs to be induced into a state of intense fear or anxiety by threats real, imagined, or fabricated and once in a state of panic the door is open for either the positive or negative reaction to unfold. If a society is composed of self-reliant, resilient and inwardly strong individuals a positive reaction can take place, but if it is composed of mainly weak, insecure and helpless individuals a descent into the delusions of a mass psychosis becomes a real possibility. Great stress, in other words, can bring out the best in an individual or society at large, but it can also bring out the worst, or as the psychologist Anthony Storr writes about the potential for a mass psychosis:

“ . . it is only if we accept the existence of a latent paranoid potential lurking in the recesses of the normal mind that we can explain the mass delusions which led to the persecution of witches and the Nazi slaughter of Jews. Vast numbers of ordinary men and women held beliefs about witches and Jews which, if they had been expressed by one or two individuals instead of by whole communities, would have been dismissed as paranoid delusions. There are extremely primitive, irrational mental forces at work in the minds of all of us which are usually overlaid and controlled by reason, but which find overt expression in the behaviour of those whom we call mentally ill, and which also manifest themselves in the behaviour of normal people when under threat or other forms of stress.”

Anthony Storr, Solitude: A Return to the Self

In the next video of the series we will explore how certain ideas, or what the Russian author Fyodor Dostoevsky called demons, can induce a societal-wide flood of negative emotions and therefore pave the way for a mass psychosis. Ideas, as we will learn, are so powerful that at times they can possess us, consume us or even destroy us. Those who control the flow of information in a society, and the ideas we accept as true or false, exert a great power over the course of civilization.

“It was not you who ate the idea, but the idea that ate you.”

Fyodor Dostoevsky, Demons

Or as Jung echoes:

“Once upon a time men were possessed by devils, now they are not less obsessed by ideas. . .”

Carl Jung, Psychology and Religion



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Is the Mainstream Media a Threat to Freedom and Sanity?

“I rejoice that horses and steers have to be broken before they can be made the slaves of men, and that men themselves have some wild oats still left to sow before they become submissive members of society.”

Henry David Thoreau, Walking

If this claim of Henry David Thoreau’s is true – that we must be broken before we become enslaved and submissive – then we are a broken population. For most of us are submissive to a fault. We do what we are told no matter how absurd, idiotic, or immoral, so long as the command comes from a politician, bureaucrat, or scientist. In exchange for protection from relatively trivial threats we have given away our freedom and are permitting the rise of a truly deadly threat – totalitarianism. But can the tides be turned? In this video we are going to make the case that the internet, smartphones, and social media are technologies that may prove very unfavourable to those who wish to place us in the chains of a technocratic totalitarianism.

It is said that politics is downstream from culture – that culture, in other words, determines the type of rule that emerges in a society. But one could also say that culture is downstream from technology. Technological innovations, by creating new possibilities for how we interact with the world, change culture. Of all the technological revolutions that engender cultural change, changes in communication technologies are among the most impactful. For these technologies sculpt the flow

of information and information is power. Information directs our focus and so helps shape our perception of reality. Information demonstrates what is possible and so influences how we act. And in the political realm information legitimizes or delegitimizes a ruling class structure. Change the communication technology and you change the flow of information. Change the flow of information and you change a culture. Change a culture and you change the political status quo.

A cursory glance at two communication technology revolutions that preceded the rise of the internet – the invention of Gutenberg’s moveable-type printing press in the mid-15th century and the rise of the mass media of radio and television in the 20th century – reveals the dramatic social change that comes in their wake.

“Socially, the typographic extension of man brought in nationalism, industrialism, mass markets, and universal literacy and education.”

Marshall McLuhan, Understanding Media

The printing press led to an explosion in the publishing of books. It is estimated that only 12,000 books were copied by all the scribes in Europe in the 50 years prior to this invention while in the 50 years following it approximately 12 million books were produced. By reducing the cost of publishing a book, information flowed into more houses and ideas expanded the minds of a greater number of people and with profound political implications. The increase in the number of bibles was an important factor in the Reformation and the pamphlet movement was a driving force of the French and American Revolutions.

“As a result of Gutenberg’s invention monarchs were beheaded, world maps were redrawn. . . Modern society and modern economics were born.”

Andrey Miroshnichenko, Human as Media

The next major communication revolution was the invention of the electric telegraph and the radio, telephone and television which followed soon after. These technologies diminished the need for a transportation network of rail, road, and sea to spread information and so shrunk the globe. The ability to beam information into every home in a nation simultaneously, gave rise to the paradigm of the mass media that defined the 20th century. In 1947, The Commission of Freedom of the Press gave a prescient description of the power unleashed by the informational flows of this new media paradigm:

“The modern press itself is a new phenomenon. Its typical unit is the great agency of mass communication. Those agencies facilitate thought and discussion. They can stifle it. They can advance the progress of civilization or they can thwart it. They can debase and vulgarize mankind. They can endanger the peace of the world . . . They can play up or down the news and its significance, foster and feed emotions, create complacent fictions and blind spots, misuse the great words, and uphold empty slogans.

A Free and Responsible Press by The Commission on Freedom of the Press, 1947

The mass media of radio and television structures a top-down informational flow. The relative few who own and operate the broadcasting infrastructure in cooperation with the wealthy and powerful

individuals, corporations, and institutions who influence the institutions of mass media, filter, manipulate and package the content in ways that serve their interests.

“The [mass] media proclaim themselves a supplier, but it really serves as a valve, which opens for money or when given permission to by the authorities.”

Andrey Miroshnichenko, Human as Media

Mass media made possible a never-before-seen conformity in worldviews and proved an excellent paradigm for the furtherance of ideologies that favoured top-down, centralized control. For those who determine what information flows through the mass media have the power to direct the attention of the masses toward certain issues and events, and away from others or as Michael Parenti explains:

“If the press cannot mold our every opinion, it can frame the perceptual reality around which our opinions take shape. Here may lie the most important effect of the news media: they set the issue agenda for the rest of us, choosing what to emphasize and what to ignore or suppress, in effect, organizing much of our political world for us. The media may not always be able to tell us what to think, but they are strikingly successful in telling us what to think about.”

Michael Parent, Inventing Reality: The Politics of Mass Media

In a more cynical manner, one could say that mass media grants the few who control it the sort of power depicted in George Orwell’s novel 1984:

“Power is in tearing human minds to pieces and putting them together again in new shapes of your own choosing.”

George Orwell, 1984

The Nazis made use of the mass media to induce their population into accepting totalitarian rule, for as the Nazi propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels stated: “Our way of taking power and using it would have been inconceivable without the radio...” Gordon Allport and Hadley Cantril, in their 1935 book *The Psychology of Radio*, echoed the sentiment behind Goebbels claim writing:

“Radio is an altogether novel medium of communication, preeminent as a means of social control and epochal in its influence upon the mental horizons of men.”

Gordon Allport and Hadley Cantril, The Psychology of Radio

A unidirectional, limited, and filtered flow of information, all in the control of a select few and served up to the gullible masses creates a situation analogous to Plato’s allegory of the cave. In this allegory prisoners are chained in a cave and forced to watch the dancing of shadows on walls. Not knowing any better, the prisoners mistake the shadows for reality and as Richard Weaver writes in *Ideas Have Consequences*:

“. . .the [mass media] is a translation into actuality of Plato’s celebrated figure of the cave. The defect of the prisoners. . .is that they cannot perceive the truth. The wall

before them, on which the shadows play, is the screen on which press, motion picture, and radio project their account of life.”

Richard Weaver, Ideas Have Consequences

And herein lies the power of the internet revolution – it is a means for the masses to escape from the cave of manipulated shadows. For each time one of us identifies corruption by institutional authorities, sees through a lie, or identifies an act of propaganda – once we notice in other words, that what is thought to be a truth is but the manipulation of a shadow – we can reveal our discovery to an audience of potentially millions. The internet revolution is ending the monopoly the mass media has on the flow of information and so if the printing press led to an emancipation of readership, then as Miroshnichenko writes:

“What we are experiencing now is . . .the emancipation of authorship. Personal computers as well as mobile devices. . .have given all individuals the unlimited right to share their thoughts with others, whatever their reason. . .”

Andrey Miroshnichenko, Human as Media

Will the emancipation of authorship be as transformative as the communication revolutions that preceded it? Time will tell but, to quote Miroshnichenko once again:

“. . .if historical analogies are accurate, then we should . . . expect comparable cataclysms [following the rise of the internet]. The powers of the old authorities. . .have always collapsed along with their loss of sacral control over information. As a result, the social, political and economic status quo falls apart. With every release of content, society sheds its old form, like a snake sheds its skin.” (Human as Media)

Andrey Miroshnichenko, Human as Media

The informational flows made possible by the internet should not be viewed as solely destructive and delegitimizing in their effects. Rather, in a more constructive manner they are revealing alternative possibilities for how society can operate and how individuals can live their lives. Be it alternatives to the inflationary monetary system of fiat currency, to the government control of education and healthcare or to the political structure of society at large, ideas that would never have been permitted in the controlled paradigm of the mass media are being spread by the emancipation of authorship. This new media paradigm is unleashing the creative destruction needed to keep society from descending into the rot of stagnation.

But as this free flow of information is threatening to the parasitic lifestyle of many who occupy positions of power, we should expect increased calls for censorship in the attempt to force us back into the cave of deceptions. This censorship will be justified as needed to limit hate speech and to correct misinformation – but these excuses are merely the attractive packaging being used to hide what is a socially destructive act – the stifling of free speech in the attempt to protect powerful interests. The emancipation of authorship threatens the legitimacy of the oligarchical class of politicians, bureaucrats and crony capitalists and their ability to pull off their machinations behind the protective veil of the manipulated mass media.

“The gods and men who have kept their prestige for long have never tolerated discussion. For the crowd to admire, it must be kept at a distance.”

Gustave Le Bon, The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind

This is not the first time attempts have been made to limit the informational flows that emerge from new communication technologies. Following the invention of the printing press the ruling class of Europe implemented harsh censorship laws. One example was the English Licensing Order of 1643 which mandated the arrest of anyone who printed books critical of the government. But the power of the printing press proved too strong, its effects could not be contained by mandates of a ruling class grasping for power and as Marshall McLuhan wrote:

“Once a new technology comes into a [society] it cannot cease to permeate that [society] until every institution is saturated.”

Marshall McLuhan, Understanding Media

But history merely rhymes, it does not repeat. And it is possible that if we are too passive and do not take a hard stance against attempts to stifle free speech, then this technological revolution will be one that differs from those of the past. Those in power will learn to use this new technological paradigm to their advantage and instead of liberating us, these technologies will be the tool that descends us into the hell of a technocratic global totalitarianism.

“Public opinion! I don’t know how sociologists define it, but it seems obvious to me that it can only consist of interacting individual opinions, freely expressed and independent of government or party opinion. So long as there is no independent public opinion in our country, there is no guarantee that the extermination of millions and millions for no good reason will not happen again, that it will not begin any night – perhaps this very night.” (The Gulag Archipelago)

Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, The Gulag Archipelago



In 1888, the philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche wrote:

“What I relate is the history of the next two centuries. I describe what is coming, what can no longer come differently: the advent of nihilism.”

Nietzsche, The Will to Power

Nihilism is the conviction that there is no meaning to life, that the world is inhospitable to our highest hopes and values, and that there are no gods or higher purposes to justify our suffering. To be a nihilist is to flirt with despair and the sentiment that life is not worth living, and thus, the nihilist position is antithetical to life.

“...the question whether not-to-be is better than to be is itself a disease, a sign of decline...The nihilistic movement is the expression of physiological decadence.”

Nietzsche, The Will to Power

Although nihilism has existed in all times and places, it is especially prevalent in the modern West. To understand why, we are going to turn to the insights of Friedrich Nietzsche. Specifically, we are going to examine why Nietzsche thought that all the dominant worldviews of the West have been pessimistic evaluations of life, and thus, precursors to modern nihilism.

In 1885, Nietzsche saw the specter of nihilism looming on the horizon of Western civilization, and as he wrote:

“...why has the advent of nihilism become necessary? Because the values we have had hitherto thus draw their final consequence; because nihilism represents the ultimate logical conclusion of our great values and ideals...”

Nietzsche, The Will to Power

The West has long been under the spell of worldviews predicated on the existence of what Nietzsche called a true world. Such worldviews posit that along with this flawed earthly reality, there exists another, more perfect reality – a true world. Or as the philosopher Julian Young further explains in his book *The Death of God and the Meaning of Life*:

“A true world is a destination; a destination such that to reach it is to enter (or perhaps re-enter) a state of ‘eternal bliss’, a heaven, paradise or utopia. Hence true-world philosophies...give meaning to life by representing it as a journey; a journey towards ‘redemption’, towards an arrival which will more than make up for the stress and discomfort of the travelling...a true-world account of the proper course of our lives is a kind of story, a narrative.”

Julian Young, The Death of God and the Meaning of Life

One of the first, and most influential, true world philosophies in Western history was forged in the mind of the Ancient Greek philosopher Plato. According to Plato, the earthly reality we perceive with our senses is a deception. It is akin to watching shadows on the wall of cave. Plato called this deceptive reality the world of Becoming, and posited that behind it exists an unchanging world of Being, a true world, which is the realm of the Forms. For Plato the meaning of life is to turn away from our senses, temper our emotions, and through the development of our intellect grasp the Forms that exist in the world of Being. This is the path to truth, to enlightenment, and to the elimination of suffering, and as Julian Young writes:

“Plato’s way of giving meaning to life...has dominated virtually the entire history of Western thought and feeling. I am referring, here, in the first instance, to Christianity – though, as we will see, Platonism (which I use as a synonym for ‘true-worldism’) continued, in disguised forms, to dominate Western thinking even in the materialist atmosphere of the post-Christian era. But let us attend, for now, to Christianity.” (Julian Young)

Julian Young, The Death of God and the Meaning of Life

Nietzsche famously wrote that “Christianity is Platonism for the masses”, by which he meant that the Christian worldview is a slightly modified version of Platonism, but with greater mass appeal. For like Platonism, the Christian worldview is a true world theory. According to it, this world is a spiritually and morally degraded, or “fallen”, world, and in it we suffer for sins against God. Yet over and above this fallen world exists the kingdom of heaven – the true world – where the souls of the righteous find salvation, redemption, eternal life, and happiness, following the death of their mortal flesh.

“One does not, I think, need much convincing that Christianity (according to Nietzsche, the product of St Paul’s grafting of Jesus’ ethics on to Greek metaphysics) is basically a version of Platonism, of the true-world/true-home view of reality. There is, of course, not a complete identity between Platonism and Christianity. There is, for example, no omnipotent creator-God in Plato...Yet in both the Platonic and the Christian story...

there is the same metaphysical division between the natural and the supernatural worlds, between earth and heaven, with the latter portrayed as home and the former as a place of exile.”

Julian Young, The Death of God and the Meaning of Life

It is well known that Nietzsche heralded the death of god, by which he meant that in the West the belief in a monotheistic god was in decline. Yet what is less known is that he also forecasted that following the death of god true world theories would continue to flourish. However, rather than positing a transcendental heaven and redemption in the afterlife, these post-Christian true world philosophies structured themselves around the possibility of redemption in this life, and the coming of a heaven on earth that is forged by the hands of men. Nietzsche referred to these post-Christian true world theories as “shadows of god”, and as he wrote:

“God is dead; but given the way of men, there may still be caves for thousands of years in which his shadow will be shown.”

Nietzsche, The Gay Science

The political ideologies which plagued the 20th century, be it fascism, socialism, communism, or totalitarianism, are shadows of god. Nietzsche called socialism “latent Christianity”, while Carl Jung, 75 years after Nietzsche, took note of the correlation in Europe between the decline in religious belief and the rise in political fanaticism.

“The State takes the place of God...the socialist dictatorships are religions.”

Carl Jung, The Undiscovered Self

The practitioners of these political true world theories wanted to socially engineer a New Man who would be redeemed from past defects and sins, and they promised their followers that, if given enough power and control, the State would construct a true world, a heaven on earth. The Nazi ideology, for example, promised the coming of an Aryan utopia, while the theologian of communism, Karl Marx, stated that the arrival of a communist utopia would mark what he called “the end of history”.

“Communism is Utopia, that is nowhere. It is the avatar of all our religious eschatologies: the coming of the Messiah, the second coming of Christ, nirvana. It is not a historical prospect, but a current mythology.”

Immanuel Wallerstein, Historical Capitalism with Capitalist Civilization

In the 20th century Czech writer Milan Kundera echoed this sentiment:

“Totalitarianism is not only hell, but also the dream of paradise—the age-old dream of a world where everybody would live in harmony, united by a single common will and faith...If totalitarianism did not exploit these archetypes, which are deep inside us all and rooted deep in all religions, it could never attract so many people...”

Milan Kundera, The Book of Laughter and Forgetting

In our age, there exist still other shadows of god. Some of the more radical environmentalist movements are seeking to harness State power in order to radically diminish humanity's impact on nature and create an environmental utopia, where humans redeem themselves from what are seen as sins against Mother Earth. Some believe that if we follow science, and harness the power of technology, big data and artificial intelligence, we will be able to construct a technocratic, or scientifically managed utopian society. The transhumanist movement is predicated on the belief that by merging man with machine we will be able to transcend human frailties and, at some point in the future, become like gods. Many spiritual movements see the world as invariably moving towards a utopia characterized by universal love, freedom, and harmony.

While all these shadows of god possess flocks of disciples, today the true world theory of choice for the masses is what the 20th century psychologist Michael Mahoney called the myth of arrival. Those who subscribe to this myth believe that one day they will reach a turning point in life; all their frustrations and problems will disappear, and they will finally be happy. In other words, they believe that in the future they will enter their own personal utopia, or true world, or as Mahoney writes:

“Embedded in the myth of arrival...is the message that...there will come a day when our struggles and suffering will be finished. Depression, anxiety, anger, and all manner of “ill being” will finally end. We will wake up one morning and clearly recognize that we have “arrived”: We will have gotten ourselves and our lives “together” in a way that can never be undone. We will be healthy and happy. We’ll be in the job, the home, and the relationship that we have always wanted, financially comfortable and fundamentally at peace with ourselves.”

Michael Mahoney, Constructive Psychotherapy

What Platonism, Christianity, and the post-Christian political and secular shadows of god have in common is that at essence they are deeply pessimistic. Putting aside the question of whether a true world does or ever will exist, all these worldviews are predicated on a rejection of this earthly reality and a condemnation of the present moment, or as Nietzsche explains:

“...the concept “the true world” insinuates that this world is untruthful, deceptive, dishonest, inauthentic, inessential—and consequently also not a world adapted to our needs.

Nietzsche, The Will to Power

What is it that leads people to reject this earthly reality, which is the only reality we know for certain exists, and to posit the existence of true world? According to Nietzsche, it is a psychological need which is the driving force behind all true world philosophies. Those who subscribe to these worldviews tend to be morally and spiritually weak and unable to cope with the human condition without a psychological crutch. Such people, therefore, *need* to believe in the existence of a true world where they will find lasting peace and salvation, otherwise, they would be crippled by suffering and incapable of enduring life. Or as Nietzsche writes:

“General insight: it is the instinct of life-weariness...which has created the “other world”...to imagine another, more valuable world is an expression of hatred for the world that makes one suffer...Does man not eternally create a fictitious world for himself because he wants a better world than reality?”

Nietzsche, The Will to Power

As true world philosophies are pessimistic evaluations of our lot on earth, they are precursors of nihilism, for as Nietzsche wrote: “*Pessimism is a preliminary form of nihilism.*” (*Nietzsche, The Will to Power*) All that is required to move from being a believer in a true world to a full-blown nihilist is a simple crisis of faith. For if, or when, doubt deflates one’s belief in a true world, then one is forced to confront the possibility that this earthly reality and the here and now – which one has already judged to be irreparably flawed and insufficient – is all there is. In the Will to Power, Nietzsche writes:

“The development of pessimism into nihilism.... – The repudiated world versus an artificially built ‘true, valuable’ one. Finally: one discovers how the true world is fabricated solely from psychological needs: and now all one has left is the ‘repudiated world’, and one adds this supreme disappointment to the reasons why it deserves to be repudiated. At this point nihilism is reached:...one grants the reality of becoming as the only reality... — but cannot endure this world...”

Nietzsche, The Will to Power

As true world theories are pessimistic and a mere step away from nihilism, Nietzsche thought that to overcome nihilism what modern man needs is a worldview not dependent on a true world. We need a worldview which, rather than repudiating this earthly existence, justifies, affirms, and even embraces the suffering that is indispensable to it. We need a worldview that helps us cultivate meaning in the present moment, and in the only life we know for certain we have. We need, in short, a worldview that promotes human flourishing by remaining faithful to the here and now and to this earth. And in the next video, we will explore Nietzsche’s worldview predicated on the will to power, which he put forth as an alternative to true world theories.

“I beseech you, my brothers, remain faithful to the earth, and do not believe those who speak to you of otherworldly hopes! Poison-mixers are they, whether they know it or not. Despisers of life are they, decaying and poisoned themselves, of whom the earth is weary: so let them go.”

Nietzsche, Thus Spoke Zarathustra



ACADEMY *of* IDEAS

FREE MINDS FOR A FREE SOCIETY



“WHAT HATH GOD WROUGHT?”

These were the first words sent over the newly invented electric telegraph machine in May 1844. This message proved to be prophetic. For the communication technologies that followed in the wake of the telegraph, from the telephone, to the radio, to TV, computers, the internet, and now smart phones and social media, have radically altered the fabric of society.

In this series of videos we are going to explore some of the effects of modern communication technology use. For while remarkable achievements of human ingenuity, these technologies are a double-edged sword. Communication is easier than ever, but so too is the ability of governments and corporations to track and monitor us. The media and educational gate-keepers of old have been irreparably weakened by the rise of the internet and social media – which was a boon to curious minds – but these technologies are also being used to manipulate us through censorship and rampant propaganda. And while creating new possibilities for how we work, learn and entertain ourselves, these technologies have an addictive side that promote anxiety disorders and a wasted life.

In the first video of this series we will explore how the use of these technologies, and specifically social media use, is altering how many of us answer the fundamental question: “Who am I?”. Our answer to this question, or the story we tell ourselves about ourselves, forms our identity, or self-concept. How we approach the challenges of life, what we believe we are capable of, how we treat others, what we value and even how we view the world, all are influenced by our self-concept, or as the psychologist Michael Mahoney writes:

“Like a spontaneous projector of different light forms and frequencies, [our sense of self] formidably constrains and construes the reflections of its own castings. It is an ever-present but invisible navigator or sculptor in a lifelong journey. . .” (Human Change Process)

Michael Mahoney, Human Change Processes

The health or sickness of a society is an emergent by-product of the health or sickness of the self-concepts of the people who populate that society. A society full of individuals with weak self-concepts, self-concepts that are fearful of novelty, infused with helplessness, riddled by anxiety, plagued by self-hate or lacking in self-reliance, can only be a sick society.

“For one thing is needful: that a human being should attain satisfaction with himself... only then is a human being at all tolerable to behold. Whoever is dissatisfied with himself is continually ready for revenge, and we others will be his victims...”

Nietzsche, The Gay Science

Our self-concept is in continuous development and it is the product of many factors, including our upbringing, education, biology, environment, interpersonal relations and intrapersonal experiences. But one of the most important factors in the shaping of our selfhood is the predominant identity formation mechanism of our society. To understand what an identity formation mechanism is, we will examine the two mechanisms that preceded the rise of social media, namely sincerity and authenticity.

Sincerity prevailed in the West until a few generations ago and was based on the idea that one's identity was intimately tied to a set of social roles. These roles were not chosen by the individual, but given to him or her by family and community. One's identity then emerged in the attempt to play these roles in a sincere manner.

“In earlier times, identity was typically assigned by the social roles one was born into. Along with birth came not only one's gender but also one's tribal or ethnic identity, one's social class, one's profession, and one's religion.” (You and Your Profile)

Hans-Georg Moeller and Paul D'Ambrosio, You and Your Profile

In the 19th and 20th centuries greater social mobility and more equality of opportunity unleashed a newfound freedom of self-expression. Pre-determined social roles of class, gender, religion and ethnicity declined in importance and the identity formation mechanism of sincerity was replaced by authenticity. Under authenticity one discovers, realizes or creates one's identity and so selfhood formation becomes an individual's task. For some this proves to be a blessing as it unlocks possibilities and potentials that are stunted when one is expected to sincerely conform to predetermined social roles, for others it is a burden as with freedom of self-expression comes responsibility for the self that is created.

But a strange thing has occurred with the rise of social media: many people are reverting back to a mechanism of identity formation that resembles sincerity, a mechanism of identity formation which Hans-Georg Moeller and Paul D'Ambrosio in *You and Your Profile*, have termed *proficiency*. Like sincerity, *proficiency* is other-directed and reliant on the reactions of an audience. With sincerity one's family and community are the audience that casts judgement on how sincerely, or properly, one plays the pre-determined roles. With *proficiency* the audience is a generalized peer group consisting of hundreds, thousands or even millions of social media users and this audience plays a somewhat different role than under sincerity: not only does the audience judge the identity one forms, but it also helps shape the very roles one strives to play. For *proficiency* entails creating profiles on social media through the selective display of pictures and other bits of information, or in

a more passive manner merely observing the profiles of admired personalities, and then using these idealized profiles as roles to play in real life. Or as Jeremy Weissman explains in *The Crowdsourced Panopticon*:

“... a simultaneous exchange occurs between the two entities, our digital [profiles] and our in-real-life self. As we broadcast idealized portraits of our in-real-life self online, we then in turn adjust our in-real-life self so as to meet with popular approval when we are broadcast online again. At a certain point, our in-real-life self and digital [profiles] practically merge.”

Jeremy Weissman, The Crowdsourced Panopticon

Forming an identity through the mechanism of proficlicity has serious drawbacks. Firstly, it promotes an unhealthy degree of conformity. For to succeed in the world of social media is to conform as a successful profile is measured by metrics such as likes, shares and follows. But proficlicity necessitates not just conforming to the preferences of one's peer group, but also conforming to the standards set by those who manipulate the algorithms of social media, or as Weissman writes:

“Through the ever-increasing gaze of a pervasive audience online, we may become overly pressured, even coerced toward collective opinion, as social media's mechanism of likes, dislikes, friends, and followers constantly subjects us to the crowd's judgment along with that gaze.”

Jeremy Weissman, The Crowdsourced Panopticon

By promoting a hyper-conformity, proficlicity limits our potential as the generalized peer group of social media users, and the manipulators of social media algorithms, have no interest in many elements that comprise a healthy sense of self. With proficlicity if we step too far out of line, if we are too unique, or if our value system diverges too far from what is deemed acceptable, we will be shunned, shamed and ostracized. Appearances, superficialities, and adhering to the values of popular culture are what matter with proficlicity, not cultivating a harmonized mind, a healthy body and a fulfilling life. What is more if we live in a sick society, this sickness will be embodied in the preferences of the generalized peer group and so in seeking validation of this crowd, and embodying their preferences, we lock ourselves into a sick sense of self.

“Once we give up our true self to play a role, we are fated to be rejected because we have already rejected ourselves. Yet we will struggle to make the role more successful, hoping to overcome our fate but finding ourselves more enmeshed in it. We are caught in a vicious cycle that keeps closing in, diminishing our life and being.”

Alexander Lowen, Fear of Life

But the flaws of proficlicity are not limited to the stunting of our potential as this method of identity formation also promotes a rigidity in belief systems that hinders social progress and generates social conflict. For integral to the construction of a successful social media profile is the display of virtuousness through supporting the moral values of one's generalized online peer group. Unlike times past when virtuousness was displayed through actions or verbal statements that were ephemeral in nature and limited in reach to one's family, friends and community members, social media creates a permanent record of one's moral stances for all the world to see. On social media

our moral stances follow us into the future with a tenacity previously unknown to most people. As a result, even when presented with facts, information or experiences that run counter to the narratives used to support one's views, many people refuse to correct them as this amounts to denying an important aspect of their social media constructed identity, or as Moeller and D'Ambrosio explain:

“Identification with the cause becomes so central and primary [in profilicity] that, strangely enough, one prefers news that the problem is really as bad as one fears it is – since this affirms the value of the cause, and thereby of one's identification with it. If climate change or civil rights should turn out to be no longer an issue, the identity of those identifying with these causes would be undermined and deflated. One's profile – built and maintained with sometimes a lifetime of effort, and in which one is thus deeply invested – would lose its social validity and become obsolete. The stronger the identification with a cause, the more the care for the cause also becomes the care for oneself.”

Hans-Georg Moeller and Paul D'Ambrosio, You and Your Profile

Under profilicity, the pursuit of truth has given way to the maintenance of identities and this is a recipe for a polarized society. To make matters worse, with social media algorithms being manipulated by tech companies in ways that serve powerful institutional interests, many people fail to realize that the moral stances of popular culture are merely stances that further the agendas of corrupt corporations and governments. But the societal impacts of modern communication technologies run even deeper than this, for as we will explore in the next video, these technologies may be leading us into the dystopian and prison-like conditions of a crowd-sourced panopticon – into a world where we are both the prisoners and guards in an all-pervasive, mass surveillance state.



The Big Lie – How to Enslave the World

“And the lie has, in fact, led us so far away from a normal society that you cannot even orient yourself any longer; in its dense, gray fog not even one pillar can be seen.”

Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, The Gulag Archipelago

Lying has always been used for political purposes. Lies cover up corruption, past mistakes and hidden motives, and they are an essential ingredient in political campaigning. Sometimes, however, political lies take on a much more sinister form. The lies become all-encompassing, embrace all aspects of life and infect every corner of society. This occurrence is a sign that totalitarianism may be rising. For as the political philosopher Hannah Arendt noted, totalitarianism, at its essence, is an attempt at “transforming reality into fiction”. It is the attempt of corrupt and pathological state actors to impose a fictional account of the world onto the entire population. In Nazi Germany it was the idea of a superior race and an unclean people that formed the big lie, in the Soviet Union it was the belief that state communism could work and that all could be made equal. And from this big lie trickled down a stream of endless little lies. Referring to Communist Russia, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn wrote:

“In our country the lie has become not just a moral category but a pillar of the State.”

Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, The Oak and the Calf

Describing Czechoslovakia under Soviet rule, Vaclav Havel similarly explained:

“...life in the system is so thoroughly permeated with hypocrisy and lies...Because the regime is captive to its own lies, it must falsify everything. It falsifies the past. It falsifies the present, and it falsifies the future. It falsifies statistics.”

Václav Havel, The Power of the Powerless

When a political system rests upon a bed of lies, what can be done to turn the tide back towards truth and freedom? In this video, drawing from the insights of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn and Vaclav Havel, we are going to explore this question.

The day before he was exiled from the Soviet Union, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn published a short essay titled *Live Not By Lies*, and in it he wrote:

“We are approaching the brink; already a universal spiritual demise is upon us; a physical one is about to flare up and engulf us and our children, while we continue to smile sheepishly and babble: “But what can we do to stop it? We haven’t the strength.”...But we can do—everything!—even if we comfort and lie to ourselves that this is not so. It is not “they” who are guilty of everything, but we ourselves, only we!”

Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, Live Not By Lies

When a state turns totalitarian the individuals who live in these societies are not merely its victims. All the totalitarian regimes of the 20th century rose to power amidst thunderous applause as many citizens openly called for the brutal control that defines this form of rule. Without mass support and compliance the great minority in the ruling class would be but paper tigers. The responsibility for the oppression, suffering, and loss of life that comes in the wake of totalitarianism, therefore, cannot be placed exclusively on politicians and bureaucrats. A large portion of responsibility must be placed on the citizens who support this form of rule, or else do nothing to resist. Vaclav Havel explains in his book *The Power of the Powerless*:

“There is obviously something in human beings which responds to this [totalitarian] system... Human beings are compelled to live within a lie, but they can be compelled to do so only because they are in fact capable of living in this way. Therefore not only does the system alienate humanity, but at the same time alienated humanity supports this system as its own involuntary masterplan, as a degenerate image of its own degeneration, as a record of people’s own failure as individuals.”

Václav Havel, The Power of the Powerless

If the fuel for the growth of totalitarianism is weak and fearful individuals, then a cure is a personal revolution that takes place in hearts and minds and leads to an awakening of self-responsibility, courage and strength.

“The best resistance to totalitarianism is simply to drive it out of our own souls, our own circumstances, our own land, to drive it out of contemporary humankind.”

Václav Havel, The Power of the Powerless

Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn’s writings played a major role in toppling the Communist Soviet Empire, and he advised we engage in such a personal revolution by transforming our life in a way which targets the most vulnerable part of the totalitarian system – the lies upon which it is built. In *Live Not by Lies*, Solzhenitsyn explains:

“And therein we find, neglected by us, the simplest, the most accessible key to our liberation: a personal nonparticipation in lies! Even if all is covered by lies, even if all is under their rule, let us resist in the smallest way: Let their rule hold not through me!”

Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, Live Not By Lies

Vaclav Havel was a dissident in communist Czechoslovakia and he later became president, and he echoed Solzhenitsyn’s sentiment that the most effective key to liberation from totalitarian rule is to commit to a nonparticipation in lies. Havel called this commitment “living within the truth”.

“If the main pillar of the [totalitarian] system is living a lie, then it is not surprising that the fundamental threat to it is living the truth. This is why [the truth] must be suppressed more severely than anything else.”

Václav Havel, The Power of the Powerless

To engage in a nonparticipation in lies, or in Havel’s terminology, to “live within the truth”, is to stop parroting the lies of the state and to refrain from acting in ways which conform to state propaganda. It is to resolve to live as freely and authentically as possible, to boldly express our individuality and spontaneity.

“...spontaneity with its incalculability, is the greatest of all obstacles to total domination over man.”

Hannah Arendt, The Origins of Totalitarianism

It is to follow our conscience and place morality above unjust laws, to fearlessly pursue personal and communal values, and to give voice to our thoughts undeterred by ridicule. To live within the truth is to act in ways which promote a cultural reawakening, thus serving as a counterforce to the totalitarian system’s coercive march towards cultural stagnation, suffering, and death.

“Our way must be: Never knowingly support lies!”

Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, Live Not By Lies

In communist Czechoslovakia, the Velvet Revolution, or non-violent fall of totalitarianism, according to Havel, depended not so much upon political reform, but upon the existence of growing numbers of:

“...individuals who were willing to live within the truth, even when things were at their worst. . .They could equally have been poets, painters, musicians, or simply ordinary citizens who were able to maintain their human dignity...One thing, however, seems clear: the attempt at political reform was not the cause of society’s reawakening, but rather the final outcome of that reawakening.”

Václav Havel, The Power of the Powerless

As an example of how living within the truth can revitalize a society, Havel recounts the story of a rock band, The Plastic People of the Universe. In communist Czechoslovakia musicians were required to register with authorities and were banned from creating music deemed too provocative or threatening to the political system. The Plastic People of the Universe refused to toe the line and following a concert in 1976 they were arrested, and the ensuing trial gained enormous public interest. The state media branded the band members as drug addicts, mentally ill, extremists and traitors to the country. However, many of the citizens had grown tired of living within a lie and they supported the young musicians, and as Havel notes, in many respects the trial marked the beginning of the end of the totalitarianism in Czechoslovakia. Havel writes:

“[The Plastic People of the Universe] were unknown young people who wanted no more than to be able to live within the truth, to play the music they enjoyed. . .and to live freely in dignity and partnership...They had been given every opportunity to adapt to the status quo, to accept the principles of living within a lie and thus to enjoy life undisturbed by the authorities. Yet they decided on a different course...In some ways the trial was the final straw...People...came to realize that not standing up for the freedom of others...meant surrendering one’s own freedom.”

Václav Havel, The Power of the Powerless

Along with demonstrating the real-world impact that can result from the actions of ordinary individuals who live within the truth, that a young rock band sparked a movement that toppled the totalitarian system in

Czechoslovakia unveils an important but underappreciated characteristic of this type of political system: despite appearances, it is by its nature weak, brittle, and in need of constant infusions of fear and lies in order to prevent it from collapsing. This weakness is why totalitarian regimes constantly slander and persecute anyone, even harmless musicians, who engage in even a modest attempt to live within the truth. For truth is the primary enemy of totalitarianism as it erodes the foundation of lies upon which it is built. Havel explains:

“...the crust presented by the life of lies is made of strange stuff. As long as it seals off hermetically the entire society, it appears to be made of stone. But the moment someone breaks through in one place, when one person cries out, ‘The emperor is naked!’ – when a single person breaks the rules of the [totalitarian] game, thus exposing it as a game – everything suddenly appears in another light and the whole crust seems then to be made of a tissue on the point of tearing and disintegrating uncontrollably.”

Václav Havel, The Power of the Powerless

The brittleness of the totalitarian system is also why it is so important for as many people as possible to stop being servants to state lies. For just as our failure as individuals fuels the totalitarian system, so too it is a renewed courage of individuals to live within the truth which weakens and eventually destroys it. Totalitarian systems condition their citizens to believe that the individual is powerless to effectuate social and political change; but history has repeatedly shown otherwise, and as Solzhenitsyn notes:

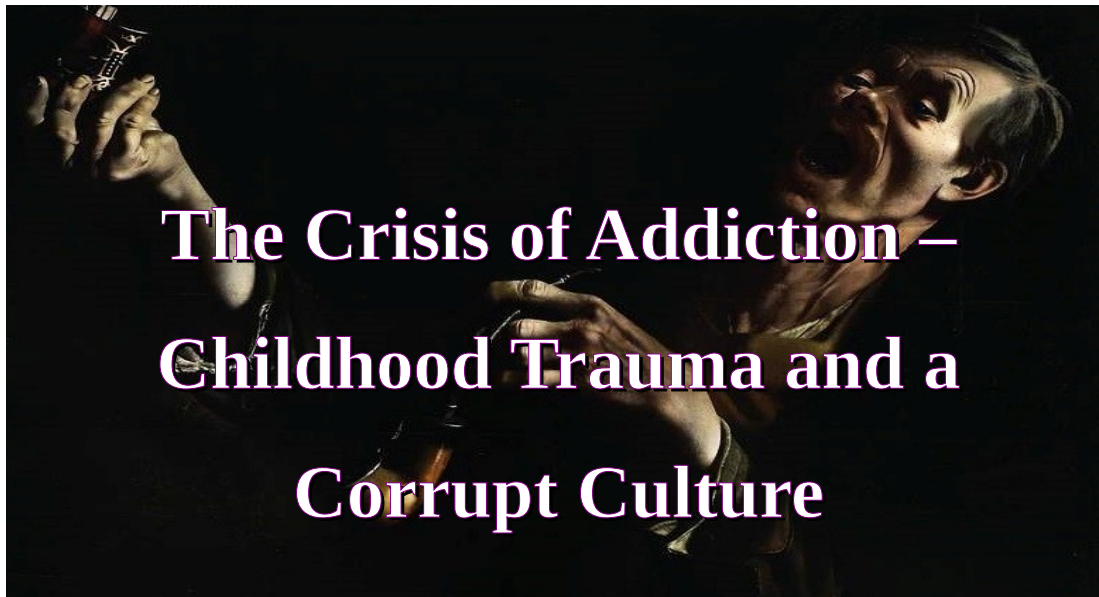
“One man who stopped lying could bring down a tyranny.”

Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, The Gulag Archipelago

What we choose to say and how we decide to act influences not just the state of our character, but the state of society. We make our own epoch. And when living in the midst of totalitarian rule, the fundamental choice to make is whether we are going to stand on the side of the truth and freedom, or on the side of lies and malevolent authority. For those who choose the latter, whether out of fear, apathy, or merely to take the path of least resistance, Solzhenitsyn had to the following to say:

“Let him not brag of his progressive views, boast of his status as an academician or a recognized artist, a distinguished citizen or general. Let him say to himself plainly: I am cattle, I am a coward, I seek only warmth and to eat my fill.”

Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, Live Not By Lies



“What is addiction, really? It is a sign, a signal, a symptom of distress. It is a language that tells us about a plight that must be understood.”

Alice Miller, Breaking Down the Wall of Silence

In the Buddhist's conception of the universe, the wheel of life revolves through 6 realms, each representing a different approach to existing in the world. One of these, the realm of the hungry ghosts, is inhabited by “creatures with scrawny necks, small mouths, emaciated limbs, and large, bloated, empty bellies.” (*Gabor Maté, In the Realm of Hungry Ghosts*) This is the realm where the addicts of the world reside. For no matter how much the addict consumes, ingests, or possesses, they always want more – even as they experience a decline in health and a ruining of their relationships and finances.

“I lose myself when caught in one of my addictive spirals. Gradually I feel an ebbing of moral strength and experience myself as hollow. Emptiness stares out from behind my eyes.”

Gabor Maté, In the Realm of Hungry Ghosts

In this video, drawing from Gabor Maté's book *In the Realm of Hungry Ghosts*, we will investigate the nature and roots of addiction.

“Addictions can never truly replace the life needs they temporarily displace”, writes Maté. “The false needs they serve, no matter how often they are gratified, cannot leave us fulfilled. The brain can never, as it were, feel that it has had enough, that it can relax and get on with other essential business. It's as if after a full meal you were left starving and had to immediately turn your efforts to procuring food again.”

Gabor Maté, In the Realm of Hungry Ghosts

Mate defines an addiction as “any repeated behavior, substance-related or not, in which a person feels compelled to persist, regardless of its negative impact on his life and the lives of others.”
(Gabor Maté, *In the Realm of Hungry Ghosts*)

When thinking of addictions, it is typical to focus on substance addictions. However, behavioral addictions are also common and can be just as destructive to the individual’s life. Compulsive social media, pornography, or video game use; gambling, sex, shopping, or even activities such as exercise or work, can potentially turn into addictions, and so as Mate further clarifies:

“Any passion can become an addiction; but then how to distinguish between the two? The central question is: who’s in charge, the individual or their behavior? It’s possible to rule a passion, but an obsessive passion that a person is unable to rule is an addiction... If in doubt, ask yourself one simple question: given the harm you’re doing to yourself and others, are you willing to stop? If not, you’re addicted. And if you’re unable to renounce the behavior or to keep your pledge when you do, you’re addicted.”

Gabor Maté, In the Realm of Hungry Ghosts

There has long been a debate as to what produces an addiction. Is it the person or the thing? While some have explained addiction as a problem that resides in people, a more accurate explanation is that addiction is the result of an interaction between subject and object. An addiction arises when an individual regularly craves a change in their subjective, or felt, state of being, and becomes dependent on an object or activity to produce the desired experiential change. In her book *Addiction by Design*, Natasha Dull Schultz explains:

“Just as certain individuals are more vulnerable to addiction than others, it is also the case that some objects, by virtue of their pharmacological or structural characteristics, are more likely than others to trigger or accelerate an addiction. Their distinctive potency lies in the capacity to engender the sort of compelling subjective shift on which some individuals come to depend.”

Natasha Dull Schultz, Addiction by Design

But given that we are, and always will be, surrounded by objects and activities that have an addictive potential, in this video we are going to explore the personal side of the addictive equation and investigate what it is that makes some individuals more susceptible to addictions than others.

Gabor Mate spent his career working with hard drug addicts in Vancouver’s downtown eastside, and as he argues, every addiction, severe or mild, substance-related or behavioral, is an attempt to find relief from distress and emotional pain.

“Addictions always originate in pain, whether felt openly or hidden in the unconscious...Far more than a quest for pleasure, chronic substance use is the addict’s attempt to escape distress.”

Gabor Maté, In the Realm of Hungry Ghosts

The forms of pain that lead an individual into an addiction are numerous and varied. Some become addicts as a way to self-medicate depression, insecurities or anxiety disorders; others to cope with highly stressful jobs or relationships; still others to ward off the pain of aimlessness or despair over the meaninglessness of their lives. Gabor Maté asked a 57 year old who had been addicted to drugs since he was a teen, why he continued to use:

“I don’t know, I’m just trying to fill a void,” he replied. “Emptiness in my life. Boredom. Lack of direction.”

Gabor Maté, In the Realm of Hungry Ghosts

In many cases, the emotional pain one seeks to escape from through an addiction has roots in the past – specifically, in childhood. Studies have shown that the majority of hard drug addicts grew up in abusive households.

“All parental difficulties reflect themselves without fail in the psyche of the child, sometimes with pathological results.”

Carl Jung, The Development of Personality

Parental influence on the child’s development and susceptibility to addictions later in life cannot be overstated. For just as the child in the uterus is embedded in, and completely dependent on, the mother’s body, so too in the first years of life, when the brain is most malleable, a child is emotionally and psychologically fused with the parents. A dysfunctional childhood spent bearing the brunt of parental anger and abuse imprints the deep pain of trauma on the child’s mind and disrupts brain development in ways that increase the likelihood of addiction. Maté explains:

“It’s just as many substance addicts say: they self-medicate to soothe their emotional pain—but more than that, their brain development was sabotaged by their traumatic experiences. The systems subverted by addiction—the dopamine and opioid circuits, the limbic or emotional brain, the stress apparatus and the impulse-control areas of the cortex—just cannot develop normally in such circumstances.”

Gabor Maté, In the Realm of Hungry Ghosts

But it is not just childhood trauma which makes one more susceptible to addiction. Children who grew up with emotionally cold or distant caregivers are also much more likely to turn to addictions in adulthood. The psychologist Allan Schore called this situation of parental emotional absence “proximal separation”; the parent is proximate, he or she is physically present and satiates all the child’s physical needs. Yet due to stress, depression, or other internal demons, the parent does not nurture the child psychologically or emotionally, and as Maté explains further:

“A child can also feel emotional distress when the parent is physically present but emotionally unavailable...in normal circumstances a child who senses emotional separation will seek to reconnect with the parent...Should the parent not respond, or not respond adequately...the child will be left to his own inadequate coping mechanisms—for example, rocking or thumb-sucking as ways of self-soothing or tuning out to escape distress. Children who have not received the attentive presence of the parent are...at greater risk for seeking chemical satisfaction from external sources later in life.”

Gabor Maté, In the Realm of Hungry Ghosts

But in the modern day, even individuals who were blessed with a nourishing childhood are not fully immune to addiction. For just like during the fall of Rome when the people, en masse, turned to pleasure-seeking to alleviate the anguish brought on by witnessing a dying culture, so too in our day many turn to addictions as a way of self-medicating the despair stimulated by a bleak view of the future of society. Add on the fact that to conform in the modern world is to adopt consumerism as a way of life and to compulsively use technology, social media, and entertainment as a means of escaping feelings of powerlessness and emptiness, and what you have is the perfect social storm that has created a crisis of addiction.

“A sense of deficient emptiness pervades our entire culture. The drug addict is more painfully conscious of this void than most people...Many of us resemble the drug addict in our ineffectual efforts to fill in the spiritual black hole, the void at the center, where we have lost touch with our souls, our spirit—with those sources of meaning and value that are not contingent or fleeting. Our consumerist, acquisition-, action-, and image-mad culture only serves to deepen the hole, leaving us emptier than before.”

Gabor Maté, In the Realm of Hungry Ghosts

Given the number of people who grow up in abusive or emotionally absent households, coupled with the corrupt state of society, it should come as no surprise that many people turn to drugs, alcohol, and behavioral addictions as a way to cope with life. This turning is not totally irrational, nor ineffective. For addictions do work; at least temporarily; they are highly effective at easing distress and emotional pain. Mate notes of a hard drug addict who reported that: “The reason I do drugs is so I don’t feel the...feelings I feel when I don’t do drugs.” Or as Vincent Felitti explained:

“Dismissing addictions as “bad habits” or “self-destructive behavior” comfortably hides their functionality in the life of the addict.”

Vincent Felitti

Addictions are not only effective in providing relief from distress and emotional pain, as indulgence can also temporarily lift one out of the monotony or misery of everyday life and into experiences laden with excitement, meaning, and bliss. Thomas de Quincey, a 19th century English writer and self-professed opium addict explained that:

“The subtle powers lodged in this mighty drug, tranquilize all irritations of the nervous system ... sustain through twenty-four hours the else drooping animal energies....all-conquering opium... Thou only givest these gifts to man; and thou hast the keys of Paradise.”

Thomas de Quincey, Confessions of an English Opium-Eater

The early 20th century psychologist William James elaborates on the powers of alcohol to not only take the “edge off”, but also to induce a state which simulates a spiritual experience – at least until the alcohol poisoning catches up with the mind and body, or as he writes:

“The sway of alcohol over mankind is unquestionably due to its power to stimulate the mystical faculties of human nature... Sobriety diminishes, discriminates, and says no; drunkenness expands, unites, and says yes. It is in fact the great exciter of the Yes function in man...it is part of the deeper mystery and tragedy of life that whiffs and gleams of something that we immediately recognize as excellent should be vouchsafed to so many of us only in the fleeting earlier phases of what in its totality is so degrading a poisoning.”

William James, The Varieties of Religious Experience

While addictions can work in the short-term, in becoming dependent on shortcuts to emotional relief and bliss a price is paid over time. The longer we persist in an addiction, the more our tolerance grows and the more we become dependent on the substance or activity in order to feel any positive emotions at all. Slowly, but surely, the addiction becomes the focal point of our life, and everything else which could provide lasting fulfillment – our health, relationships, creativity, a career, a life purpose – fades into the periphery.

What is more, addiction changes the structure of the brain in ways that undermine our capacity for voluntary control. When caught in the grip of an addiction we often find ourselves in what is called “brain lock” – our actions follow our addictive cravings all the while one part of our mind watches attentively, yet helplessly, knowing full well we are destroying our mind, body, and potential.

“The heart of addiction is dependency, excessive dependency, unhealthy dependency—unhealthy in the sense of unwhole, dependency that disintegrates and destroys.”

Sam Portaro

Given the death-grip of addiction, the vital question arises: what is the possibility of overcoming an addiction? The problem facing any attempt at a renewed, addiction free-life, is that the very apparatus that needs to heal, the brain, is the thing which, in an addiction, is damaged. And as Mate cautions:

“The worse the addiction is, the greater the brain abnormality and the greater the biological obstacles to opting for health.”

Gabor Maté, In the Realm of Hungry Ghosts

Luckily, our brains are remarkably resilient. Even well into old age it is possible for the brain to rewire itself in ways that allow one to live, perhaps for the first time, a fulfilling, healthy, and addiction-free life. And in subsequent videos, we are going to dive further into the nature of addiction and explore some insights into how we can facilitate renewal and remove ourselves, once and for all, from the realm of the hungry ghosts.

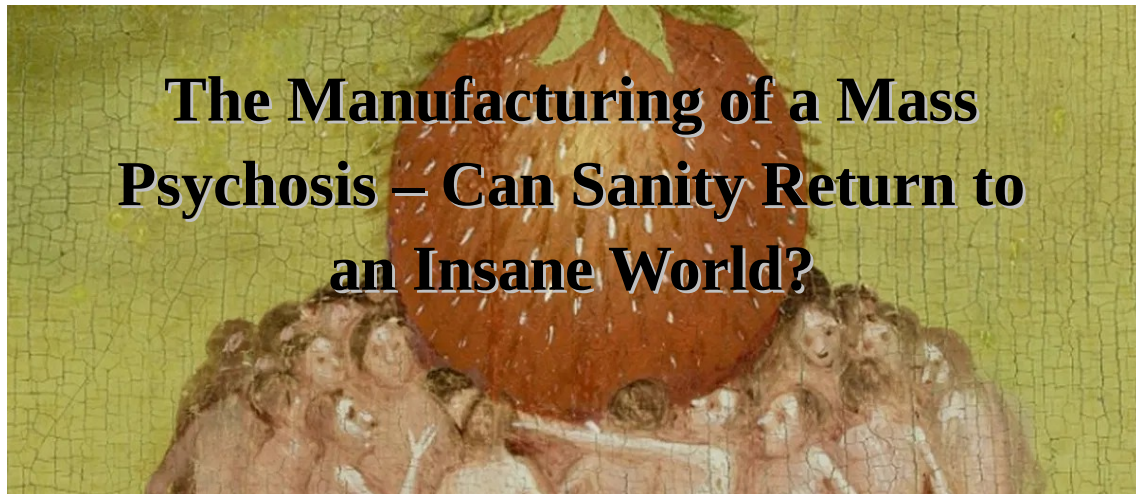
“Not every story has a happy ending...but the discoveries of science, the teachings of the heart, and the revelations of the soul all assure us that no human being is ever beyond redemption. The possibility of renewal exists so long as life exists. How to support that possibility in others and in ourselves is the ultimate question.”

Gabor Maté, In the Realm of Hungry Ghosts



ACADEMY *of* IDEAS

FREE MINDS FOR A FREE SOCIETY



“The masses have never thirsted after truth. They turn aside from evidence that is not to their taste, preferring to deify error, if error seduce them. Whoever can supply them with illusions is easily their master; whoever attempts to destroy their illusions is always their victim.”

[Gustav Le Bon, *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind*](#)

Diseases of the body can spread through a population and reach epidemic proportions, but so too can diseases of the mind. And of these epidemics of the latter variety, the mass psychosis is the most dangerous. During a mass psychosis madness becomes the norm in a society and delusionary beliefs spread like a contagion. But as delusions can take many forms, and as madness can manifest in countless ways, the specific manner in which a mass psychosis unfolds will differ based on the historical and cultural context of the infected society. In the past, mass psychoses have led to witch hunts, genocides and even dancing manias, but in the modern era it is the mass psychosis of totalitarianism that is the greatest threat:

“Totalitarianism is the modern phenomenon of total centralized state power coupled with the obliteration of individual human rights: in the totalized state, there are those in power, and there are the objectified masses, the victims.”

Arthur Versluis, The New Inquisitions

In a totalitarian society the population is divided into two groups, the rulers and the ruled, and both groups undergo a pathological transformation. The rulers are elevated to an almost god-like status which is diametrically opposed to our nature as imperfect beings who are easily corrupted by power. The masses, on the other hand, are transformed into the dependent subjects of these pathological rulers and take on a psychologically regressed and childlike status. Hannah Arendt, one of the 20th century's preeminent scholars of this form of rule, called totalitarianism an attempted transformation of "human nature itself". But this attempted transformation only turns sound minds into sick minds for as the Dutch medical doctor who studied the mental effects of living under totalitarianism wrote:

"... there is in fact much that is comparable between the strange reactions of the citizens of [totalitarianism] and their culture as a whole on the one hand and the reactions of the...sick schizophrenic on the other."

Joost Meerloo, The Rape of the Mind

The social transformation that unfolds under totalitarianism is built upon, and sustained by, delusions. For only deluded men and women regress to the childlike status of obedient and submissive subjects and hand over complete control of their lives to politicians and bureaucrats. Only a deluded ruling class will believe that they possess the knowledge, wisdom, and acumen to completely control society in a top-down manner. And only when under the spell of delusions would anyone believe that a society composed of power-hungry rulers, on the one hand, and a psychological regressed population, on the other, will lead to anything other than mass suffering and social ruin.

But what triggers the psychosis of totalitarianism? As was explored in the previous video of this series, the mass psychosis of totalitarianism begins in a society's ruling class. The individuals that make up this class, be it politicians, bureaucrats, or crony capitalists, are very prone to delusions that augment their power, and no delusion is more attractive to the power-hungry, than the delusion that they can, and should, control and dominate a society. When a ruling elite becomes possessed by a political ideology of this sort, be it communism, fascism or technocracy, the next step is to induce a population into accepting their rule by infecting them with the mass psychosis of totalitarianism. This psychosis has been induced many times throughout history, and as Meerloo explains:

"It is simply a question of reorganizing and manipulating collective feelings in the proper way."

Joost Meerloo, The Rape of the Mind

The general method by which the members of a ruling elite can accomplish this end is called menticide, with the etymology of this word being 'a killing of the mind', and as Meerloo further explains:

"Menticide is an old crime against the human mind and spirit but systematized anew. It is an organized system of psychological intervention and judicial perversion through which a [ruling class] can imprint [their] own opportunistic thoughts upon the minds of those [they] plan to use and destroy."

Joost Meerloo, The Rape of the Mind

Priming a population for the crime of menticide begins with the sowing of fear. For as was explored in the first video of this series, when an individual is flooded with negative emotions, such as fear or anxiety, he or she is very susceptible to a descent into the delusions of madness. Threats real, imagined, or fabricated can be used to sow fear, but a particularly effective technique is to use waves of terror. Under this technique the sowing of fear is staggered with periods of calm, but each of these periods of calm is followed by the manufacturing of an even more intense spell of fear, and on and on the process goes, or as Meerloo writes:

“Each wave of terrorizing . . . creates its effects more easily – after a breathing spell – than the one that preceded it because people are still disturbed by their previous experience. Morality becomes lower and lower, and the psychological effects of each new propaganda campaign become stronger; it reaches a public already softened up.”

Joost Meerloo, The Rape of the Mind

While fear primes a population for menticide, the use of propaganda to spread misinformation and to promote confusion with respect to the source of the threats, and the nature of the crisis, helps to break down the minds of the masses. Government officials, and their lackies in the media, can use contradictory reports, non-sensical information and even blatant lies, as the more they confuse the less capable will a population be to cope with the crisis, and diminish their fear, in a rational and adaptive manner. Confusion, in other words, heightens the susceptibility of a descent into the delusions of totalitarianism, or as Meerloo explains:

“Logic can be met with logic, while illogic cannot—it confuses those who think straight. The Big Lie and monotonously repeated nonsense have more emotional appeal . . . than logic and reason. While the [people are] still searching for a reasonable counter-argument to the first lie, the totalitarians can assault [them] with another.”

Joost Meerloo, The Rape of the Mind

Never before in history have such effective means existed to manipulate a society into the psychosis of totalitarianism. Smart phones and social media, television and the internet, all in conjunction with algorithms that quickly censor the flow of unwanted information, allow those in power to easily assault the minds of the masses. What is more the addictive nature of these technologies means that many people voluntarily subject themselves to the ruling elite’s propaganda with a remarkable frequency:

“Modern technology teaches man to take for granted the world he is looking at; he takes no time to retreat and reflect. Technology lures him on, dropping him into its wheels and movements. No rest, no meditation, no reflection, no conversation – the senses are continually overloaded with stimuli. [Man] doesn’t learn to question his world anymore; the screen offers him answers-ready-made.”

Joost Meerloo, The Rape of the Mind

But there is a further step the would-be totalitarian rulers can take to increase the chance of a totalitarian psychosis, and this is to isolate the victims and to disrupt normal social interactions. When alone and lacking normal interactions with friends, family and coworkers, an individual

becomes far more susceptible to delusions for several reasons: Firstly, they lose contact with the corrective force of the positive example. For not everyone is tricked by the machinations of the ruling elite and the individuals who see through the propaganda, can help free others from the menticidal assault. If, however, isolation is enforced the power of these positive examples greatly diminishes. But another reason that isolation increases the efficacy of menticide is because like many other species, human beings, are more easily conditioned into new patterns of thought and behaviour when isolated, or as Meerloo explains with regards to the physiologist Ivan Pavlov's work on behavioural conditioning:

“Pavlov made another significant discovery: the conditioned reflex could be developed most easily in a quiet laboratory with a minimum of disturbing stimuli. Every trainer of animals knows this from his own experience; isolation and the patient repetition of stimuli are required to tame wild animals. . . .The totalitarians have followed this rule. They know that they can condition their political victims most quickly if they are kept in isolation.”

Joost Meerloo, The Rape of the Mind

Alone, confused and battered by waves of terror, a population under an attack of menticide descends into a hopeless and vulnerable state. The never-ending stream of propaganda turns minds once capable of rational thought into playhouses of irrational forces and with chaos swirling around them, and within them, the masses crave a return to a more ordered world. The would-be totalitarians can now take the decisive step, they can offer a way out and a return to order in a world that seems to be moving rapidly in the opposite direction. But all this come at a price: The masses must give up their freedom and cede control of all aspects of life to the ruling elite. They must relinquish their capacity to be self-reliant individuals who are responsible for their own lives, and become submissive and obedient subjects. The masses, in other words, must descend into the delusions of the totalitarian psychosis.

“Totalitarianism is man's escape from the fearful realities of life into the virtual womb of the leaders. The individual's actions are directed from this womb – from the inner sanctum. . .man need no longer assume responsibility for his own life. The order and logic of the prenatal world reign. There is peace and silence, the peace of utter submission.”

Joost Meerloo, The Rape of the Mind

But the order of a totalitarian world is a pathological order. By enforcing a strict conformity, and requiring a blind obedience from the citizenry, totalitarianism rids the world of the spontaneity that produces many of life's joys and the creativity that drives society forward. The total control of this form of rule, no matter under what name it is branded, be it rule by scientists and doctors, politicians and bureaucrats, or a dictator, breeds stagnation, destruction and death on a mass scale. And so perhaps the most important question facing the world is how can totalitarianism be prevented? And if a society has been induced into the early stages of this mass psychosis, can the effects be reversed?

While one can never be sure of the prognosis of a collective madness, there are steps that can be taken to help effectuate a cure. This task, however, necessitates many different approaches, from many different people. For just as the menticidal attack is multi-pronged, so too must be the

counter-attack. According to Carl Jung, for those of us who wish to help return sanity to an insane world, the first step is to bring order to our own minds, and to live in a way that provides inspiration for others to follow:

“It is not for nothing that our age cries out for the redeemer personality, for the one who can emancipate himself from the grip of the collective [psychosis] and save at least his own soul, who lights a beacon of hope for others, proclaiming that here is at least one man who has succeeded in extricating himself from the fatal identity with the group psyche.”

Carl Jung, Civilization in Transition

But assuming one is living in a manner free of the grip of the psychosis there are further steps that can be taken: firstly, information that counters the propaganda should be spread as far, and as wide, as possible. For the truth is more powerful than the fiction and falsities peddled by the would-be totalitarian rulers and so their success is in part contingent on their ability to censor the free flow of information. Another tactic is to use humour and ridicule to delegitimize the ruling elite or as Meerloo explains:

“We must learn to treat the demagogue and aspirant dictators in our midst. . .with the weapon of ridicule. The demagogue himself is almost incapable of humor of any sort, and if we treat him with humor, he will begin to collapse.”

Joost Meerloo, The Rape of the Mind

A tactic recommended by Vaclav Havel, a political dissident under Soviet communist rule who later became president of Czechoslovakia, is the construction of what are called “parallel structures”. A parallel structure is any form of organization, business, institution, technology, or creative pursuit that exists physically within a totalitarian society, yet morally outside of it. In communist Czechoslovakia, Havel noted that these parallel structures were more effective at combating totalitarianism than political action. Furthermore, when enough parallel structures are created, a “second culture” or “parallel society” spontaneously forms and functions as an enclave of freedom and sanity within a totalitarian world. Or as Havel explains in his book *The Power of the Powerless*:

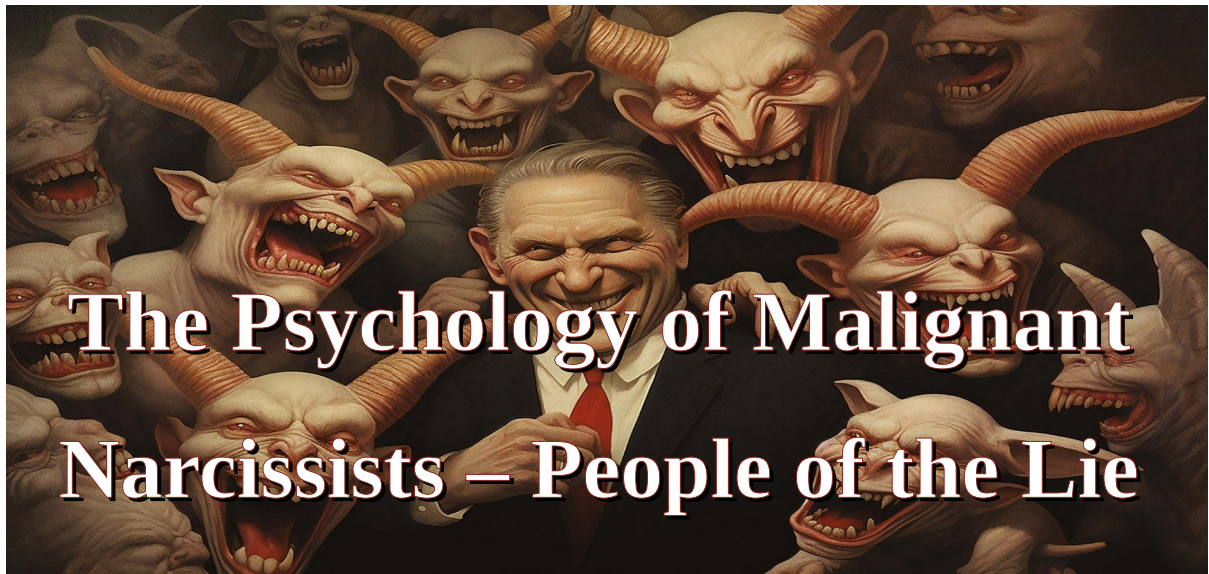
“...what else are parallel structures than an area where a different life can be lived, a life that is in harmony with its own aims and which in turn structures itself in harmony with those aims? . . .What else are those initial attempts at social self-organization than the efforts of a certain part of society...to rid itself of the self-sustaining aspects of totalitarianism and, thus, to extricate itself radically from its involvement in the... totalitarian system?”

Vaclav Havel, The Power of the Powerless

But above all else what is required to prevent a full descent into the madness of totalitarianism is action by as many people as possible. For just as the ruling elite do not sit around passively, but instead take deliberate steps to increase their power, so too an active and concerted effort must be made to move the world back in the direction of freedom. This can be an immense challenge in a world falling prey to the delusions of totalitarianism, but as Thomas Paine noted:

“Tyranny, like hell, is not easily conquered; yet we have this consolation with us, that the harder the conflict the more glorious the triumph.”

Thomas Paine, American Crisis



“Evil is not committed by people who feel uncertain about their righteousness, who question their own motives, who worry about betraying themselves. The evil in this world is committed by the spiritual fat cats, by the Pharisees of our own day, the self-righteous who think they are without sin because they are unwilling to suffer the discomfort of significant self-examination.”

M. Scott Peck, People of the Lie

Most politicians proclaim themselves to be exemplars of virtue, but many of them compulsively lie, engage in corruption, censor and demonize those who disagree with them, and enact policies that destroy society. Are such politicians aware of their hypocrisy? Do they truly believe in the morally righteous self-image they try to portray? In this video, drawing from the insights of the American psychiatrist M. Scott Peck, we explore the psychology of malignant narcissism in order to better understand the evil that has infected modern politics.

M. Scott Peck defines evil as *“that force, residing either inside or outside of human beings, that seeks to kill life or liveliness.”*, or as he continues:

“...evil is ‘live’ spelt backward. Evil is in opposition to life...Specifically, it has to do with...unnecessary killing, killing that is not required for biological survival...Evil is also that which kills spirit. There are various essential attributes of life – particularly human life – such as sentience, mobility, awareness, growth, autonomy, will. It is possible to kill or attempt to kill one of these attributes without actually destroying the body.”

M. Scott Peck, People of the Lie

All of us are capable of committing evil acts; for as Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn noted *“the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being”*. Nonetheless, two types of people are

particularly prone to evil actions: psychopaths, and malignant narcissists. The psychopath's potential for evil is well-known, but it is the malignant narcissists who may be responsible for more of the world's evil as they outnumber the psychopaths, and as Peck writes in *The People of the Lie*:

“It would be quite appropriate to classify evil people as constituting a specific variant of the narcissistic personality disorder...psychiatrists have begun to pay increasing attention to the phenomenon of narcissism, but our understanding of the subject is still in its infancy.”

M. Scott Peck, People of the Lie

The central characteristic of narcissism is an inflated sense of self. Narcissists are overconfident and admire themselves to a degree that is not warranted by the reality of who they are, or what they have accomplished. The narcissist's infatuation with a grandiose self-image leads to self-absorption, reducing their capacity to empathize with the feelings and experiences of other people. Narcissism exists on a continuum; some of the milder forms of narcissism, such as identifying with an idealized self-image one creates on social media, are unhealthy, but relatively benign. At the extreme end of the spectrum lies the pathology of malignant narcissism, in which one identifies with an illusory self-image of moral purity. Or as Peck explains:

“Utterly dedicated to preserving their self-image of perfection, [malignant narcissists] are unceasingly engaged in the effort to maintain the appearance of moral purity... While they seem to lack any motivation to be good, they intensely desire to appear good. Their ‘goodness’ is all on a level of pretense. It is, in effect, a lie. This is why they are the ‘people of the lie.’”

M. Scott Peck, People of the Lie

Malignant narcissism is a defensive phenomenon that is rooted in a deep fear of being inferior or inadequate, particularly in matters of morality. Due to childhood trauma, growing up with hyper-critical or narcissistic parents, or for other reasons of upbringing, socialization, or genetics, the malignant narcissist cannot acknowledge that, like everyone else, they make mistakes, behave immorally, and possess a potential for evil that is rooted in human nature. Or as Peck writes:

“What is the cause of this arrogant self-image of perfection, this particularly malignant type of narcissism? Basically, it is fear. [Malignant narcissists] are continually frightened that they will come face-to-face with their own evil... This terror is so chronic, so interwoven into the fabric of their being, that they may not even feel it as such. And if they could, their omnipresent narcissism will prohibit them from ever acknowledging it.”

M. Scott Peck, People of the Lie

When psychologically healthy people commit an immoral or evil act, they acknowledge their wrongdoing, feel guilt and remorse, and attempt to make amends by returning to the side of the good. Most of us, in other words, have a functioning conscience which places moral constraints on our behavior. The conscience of the malignant narcissist, in contrast, is forced into a state of dormancy by continual acts of self-deception. As the malignant narcissist's identity is anchored in a grandiose self-image of moral goodness, when he morally falters, he resorts to rationalizations, confabulations, and other defense mechanisms to maintain a feeling of moral righteousness, thus

bypassing the conscience and escaping feelings of guilt. Because the malignant narcissist silences his conscience with ongoing self-deceptions he can repeatedly lie and behave in ways that oppose life, yet still believe that he is on the side of good. Or as Peck explains further:

“It is not their sins per se that characterize [malignant narcissists], rather it is the subtlety and persistence and consistency of their sins. This is because the central defect of [malignant narcissists] is not the sin but the refusal to acknowledge it...Rather than blissfully lacking a sense of morality, like the psychopath, [malignant narcissists] are continually engaged in sweeping the evidence of their evil under the rug of their own consciousness...It is out of their failure to put themselves on trial that their evil arises.”

M. Scott Peck, People of the Lie

One of the main self-deceptive mechanisms which the malignant narcissist uses to avoid awareness of his morally imperfect self, is, paradoxically, the very mechanism that leads him to commit some of his most evil acts. This mechanism is scapegoating, which, as Peck notes, “*works through a mechanism psychiatrists call projection.*” The malignant narcissist unconsciously externalizes the emotions and motivations he cannot accept in himself, attributing them to other people, and he then blames these targets for what in reality are his own moral failings and wrongdoings.

“A predominant characteristic...of the behaviour of [malignant narcissists] is scapegoating. Because in their hearts they consider themselves above reproach, they must lash out at anyone who does reproach them. Since they must deny their own badness, they must perceive others as bad...They never think of themselves as evil; on the other hand, they consequently see much evil in others.”

M. Scott Peck, People of the Lie

Narcissistic scapegoating is on full display in the political world. Many politicians today are so desperate to appear morally righteous that they categorically refuse to consider the possibility that their policies, mandates, and social reforms are the primary drivers of much that is wrong with society. When presented with evidence of their catastrophic failures, or when other people challenge their morally flawless self-image, political malignant refuse to accept blame, and instead double down on their policies and heap the blame for society’s problems upon their favored scapegoats – be it other nations, political opponents, or individuals who merely happen to hold differing political views. Or as Peck explains:

“Strangely enough, [malignant narcissists] are often destructive because they are attempting to destroy evil. The problem is that they misplace the locus of the evil. Instead of destroying others they should be destroying the sickness within themselves... As life often threatens their self-image of perfection, [malignant narcissists] are often busily engaged in hating and destroying that life—usually in the name of righteousness...They sacrifice others to preserve their self-image of perfection...They create for those under their dominion a miniature sick society.”

M. Scott Peck, People of the Lie

In observing the sick state of society, we may be tempted to impose the diagnosis of malignant narcissism on any politician we disapprove of. But in doing so we run the risk not only of a misdiagnosis, but worse, of mimicking the malignant narcissist’s scapegoating behavior. Or as Peck reflects:

“Indeed, might I not be guilty of evil myself by so labelling others who disagree with my opinions? Might I not be misusing the concept of evil by facilely applying it to any and all who oppose my judgment?”

M. Scott Peck, People of the Lie

To avoid misdiagnosing and scapegoating others, we need to become more conscious of our dark side. For the more aware we are of our own moral failures and potential for evil, the less likely we are to project our dark side onto others. Or as Jung writes: “*Many projections can ultimately be integrated back into the individual once he recognizes their subjective origin.*” (Carl Jung, *Practice of Psychotherapy*) But by facing up to our dark side, we do more than withdraw our projections, we also develop a sixth sense to detect the darkness which lurks behind the malignant narcissists’ morally pure mask. For as the psychologist Marie Louise von Franz observed:

“If one knows about the evil possibilities within oneself then one develops a kind of second sight or capacity for getting a whiff of the same thing in other people...to go down into the depths of one’s own evil enables one usually to develop the instinctual recognition of corresponding elements in other people.”

Marie Louise von Franz, The Interpretation of Fairy Tales

With a heightened capacity to detect evil, we can help others overcome their naivety regarding the reality of human evil. For the reason malignant narcissists are able to gain popular support and persist in positions of political power, is because most people refuse to fathom the fact that someone who tries so hard to appear good, can in reality be morally corrupt. Most people, in other words, do not recognize that evil has a tendency to cloak itself in the good. Or as the psychologist Erich Fromm observed:

“...the main fallacy which prevents people from recognizing potential Hitlers before they have shown their true faces...lies in the belief that a thoroughly destructive and evil man must be a devil – and look his part; that he must bear the sign of Cain so visibly that everyone can recognize his destructiveness from afar. Such devils exist, but they are rare...much more often the intensely destructive person will show a front of kindness...he will speak of his ideals and good intentions...Hence, as long as one believes that the evil man wears horns, one will not discover an evil man.”

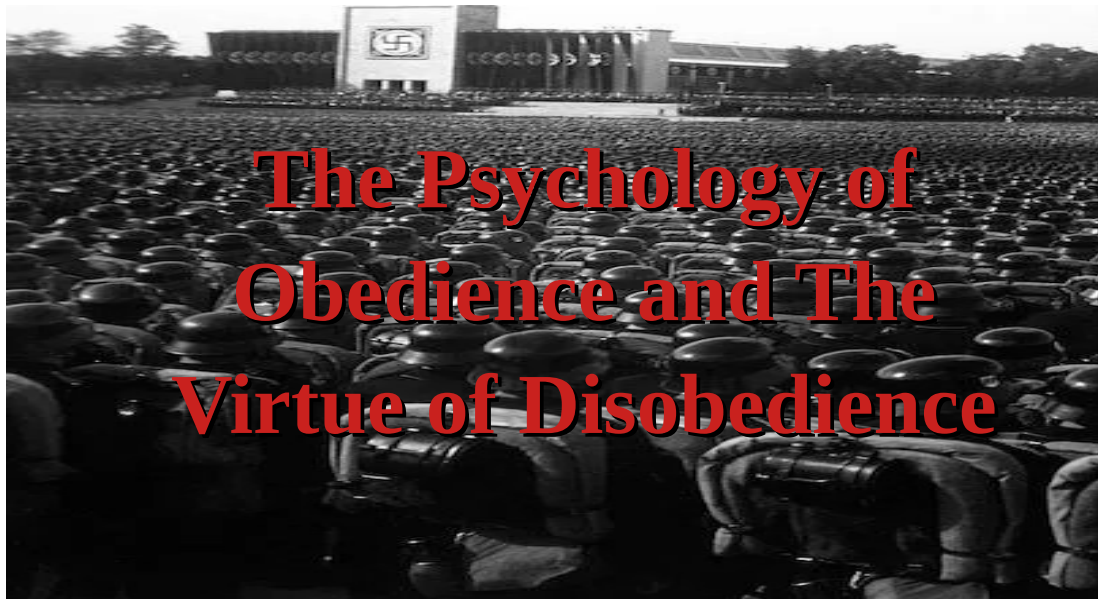
Erich Fromm, The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness

As more of us become aware of the political evil that is dividing and destroying society, we should try, as much as possible, not to let anger and hatred sully our attempts to be a force of good. Malignant narcissists are easy to hate, but harboring hatred only nourishes their malevolence and makes us easy targets of scapegoating. Hatred also harms us through the stress it generates in the mind and body. Rather than stewing in hatred, we should focus our energies on spreading the truth, as truth is one of the greatest weapons against evil – hence why Satan is often referred to as “the father of lies”. We should call out the hypocrisy of the political malignant narcissists, expose their lies, mock their overweening moral pride, and watch on as the truth renders their behavior increasingly desperate, erratic, and eventually self-destructive. “*Pride goeth before the fall*”. Or as M. Scott Peck concludes:



ACADEMY of IDEAS

FREE MINDS FOR A FREE SOCIETY



"Must the citizen ever for a moment, or in the least degree, resign his conscience to the legislator? Why has every man a conscience then? I think that we should be men first, and subjects afterward. . . The only obligation which I have a right to assume is to do at any time what I think right." (Henry David Thoreau, Civil Disobedience)

These words, penned by Henry David Thoreau in his great work *Civil Disobedience*, express a sentiment that is all but lost on the majority of people today. In the private sphere, it is normal for people to use their conscience to evaluate the morality of an action, but when it comes to the things demanded of them by their government, unquestioned obedience, with little thought as to the right or wrong of the action, is the norm.

In this video we are going to examine the psychology of obedience, paying particular attention to why people obey those in power even if it means committing actions that in any other situation they would view as immoral. We will also examine disobedience and how it acts as a crucial counter-force to the rise of an oppressive government.

Obedience can be defined as performing an action not because of a personal desire or motive, but because one is commanded to do so by someone in a position of authority. Obedience can be extremely beneficial in certain circumstances, such as in the relationship between a child and parent, or in the adherence to laws which prevent aggressive actions such as assault, theft, or murder. However, in other cases obedience can result in the most brutal of outcomes:

“...even a cursory glance at history”, wrote Arthur Koestler, “should convince one that individual crimes committed for selfish motives play a quite insignificant part in the human tragedy, compared to the numbers massacred in unselfish loyalty to one’s tribe, nation, dynasty, church, or political ideology. . .” (Arthur Koestler, Janus: A Summing Up)

What this sad fact of history suggests is that humans have a strong tendency to obey those in positions of power. Sigmund Freud recognized this stating that we should “never underestimate the power of the need to obey.” Like most of our defining characteristics, this need to obey, is in part instinctual. Stretching deep into our evolutionary past, many of the ancestors of homo sapiens organized themselves according to ranking systems or what are called dominance hierarchies. Survival in a dominance hierarchy requires the ability to make distinctions between rank and recognition of the permitted and forbidden actions based on one’s rank. Failure in either of these respects can lead to death or being cast out from one’s group and therefore those who display such traits are more likely to survive and pass on their genes.

But while the influence of dominance hierarchies in our evolutionary history can help explain the human tendency to obey, it does not fully explain why people obey even when the actions demanded of them are clearly immoral or to the detriment of their own survival. For example, looking back at the brutal reign of Stalin in Russia or the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia, why did those who lived during these times remain obedient to the point of committing the most brutal of actions including the murder and torture of completely innocent people en masse?

It may be tempting to suggest that most people are complicit in tyranny due to fear. However, while this is true to a degree, fear alone cannot account for the fact that many people do not recognize or acknowledge the injustice of their own government even when they are living under tyranny. As Don Mixon in his book *Obedience and Civilization* explains:

“We may be genuinely puzzled as to how people could obey commands that seem both bloodthirsty and stupid. Puzzlement can vanish when we realize that in the eyes of their perpetrators the hideous crimes of history are not hideous crimes at all, but acts of loyalty, patriotism and duty. From the vantage point of the present we can see them as hideous crimes, but ordinarily from that same vantage point we cannot see the crimes of our own governments as hideous or even as crimes.” (Don Mixon, Obedience and Civilization)

Michael Huemer, in his book *The Problem of Political Authority*, suggests that the existence of certain cognitive biases can help account for this inability to recognize the injustice of one’s own government. One of the most prevalent of these biases is the psychological phenomenon known as cognitive dissonance. As Huemer explains:

“According to [this] widely accepted theory...we experience an uncomfortable state, known as ‘cognitive dissonance’, when we have two or more cognitions that stand in conflict or tension with one another – and particularly when our behavior or other reactions appear to conflict with our self-image. We then tend to alter our beliefs or reactions to reduce the dissonance. For instance, a person who sees himself as compassionate yet finds himself inflicting pain on others will experience cognitive dissonance. He might reduce this dissonance by ceasing to inflict pain, changing his image of himself, or adopting auxiliary beliefs to explain why a compassionate person

may inflict pain in this situation.” (Michael Huemer, The Problem of Political Authority)

The existence of an oppressive government produces many situations where dissonance can arise as people are frequently required to take actions which conflict with their personal beliefs of right and wrong and their images of themselves as a good people. An extremely common trigger for dissonance in the modern day arises from the requirement to pay taxes to fund government activities which involve things that one views as unethical – examples could include the caging of drug users, the bailing out of crony-capitalists, the fighting of wars, or the mass surveillance of one’s own citizenry.

In other words, paying taxes, along with the knowledge that this money is being used to fund programs and activities which one sees as immoral can generate cognitive dissonance. To deal with this dissonance some people will change their beliefs regarding the beneficence and necessity of a centralized state. But a more common way to quell this dissonance is to adopt justifications to excuse these government actions or to avoid sources of information which trigger awareness of the immorality stemming from their own government.

In addition to cognitive dissonance, another psychological bias which contributes to the human willingness to obey even a tyrannical government is the status quo bias which is the *“powerful tendency to see the beliefs of [one’s] own society as obviously true and the practices of [one’s] own society as obviously right and good – regardless of what those beliefs and practices are.” (Michael Huemer, The Problem of Political Authority)*

The need to be accepted, the powerful drive to conform as well as heavy doses of indoctrination all promote the status quo bias. As Huemer explains:

“Government is an extremely prominent and fundamental feature of the structure of our society. We know that people tend to have a powerful bias in favor of the existing arrangements of their own societies. It therefore stands to reason that, whether or not any government were legitimate, most of us would have a strong tendency to believe that some governments are legitimate, especially our own and others like it.” (Michael Huemer, The Problem of Political Authority)

It is thus not surprising that so many people unquestioningly obey government commands, no matter how oppressive or tyrannical they become, when one accounts for the cognitive biases and evolved tendencies of man. In fact, Don Mixon went as far as to write:

“Obedience that occurs in a hierarchical social structure. ..needs no special explanation. However, disobedience in the same circumstances does need explaining.” (Don Mixon, Obedience and Civilization)

In the remainder of this video we will look at what promotes the likelihood of disobedience in response to tyranny. The first thing to note is that clearly people will not refuse to commit immoral acts unless they overcome the biases which promote unquestioned obedience to the state. Self-education and ridding oneself of the false beliefs that result from years of indoctrination and excessive propaganda is crucial. Only by doing this can we loosen the grip which pernicious ideologies have on our minds and instead, as Thoreau recommended, use our own conscience to evaluate the right or wrong of an action.

People are also more likely to disobey the tyrannical commands of those in power if they lose confidence in the capability of their rulers. This could potentially happen if increasing numbers of people came to realize that societies are far too complex for centralized government control to be effective. However, loss in confidence is more likely to arise due to the sheer ineptitude of politicians which makes it increasingly difficult for people to place any faith in existing government institutions.

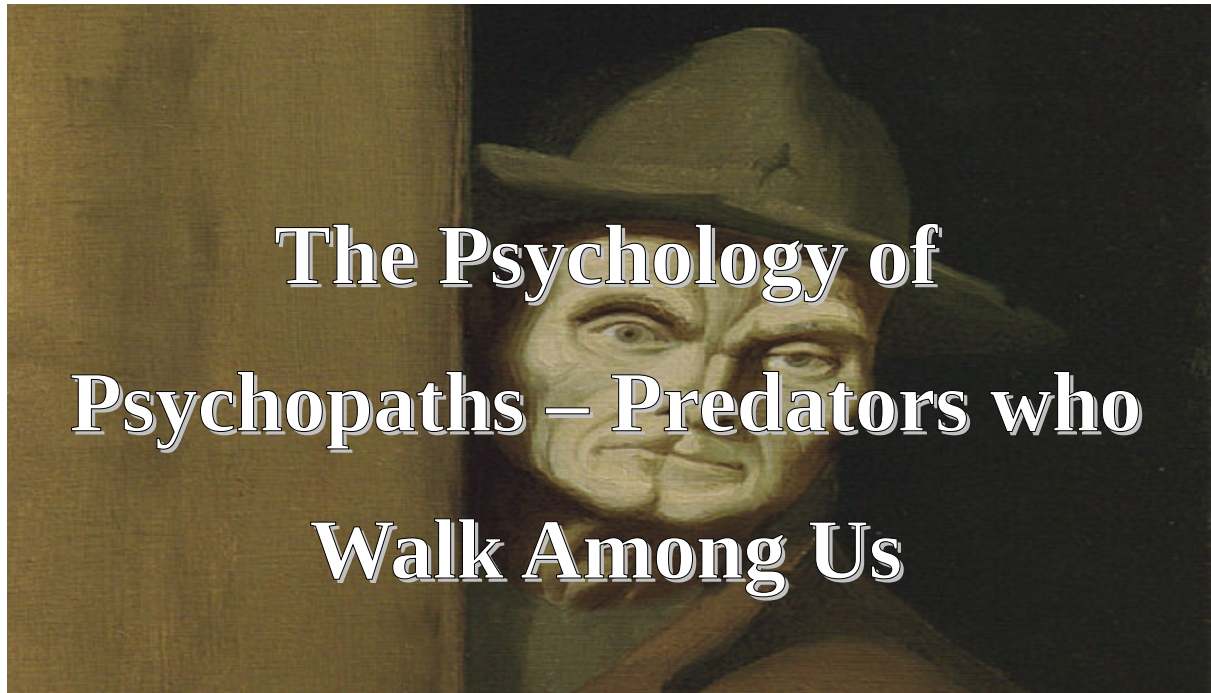
An additional factor, especially relevant these days, which impacts disobedience relates to the degree of surveillance in a society. In *Disobedience and Civilization* Don Mixon points out that mass surveillance greatly diminishes the likelihood of disobedience as it creates a situation analogous to that faced by a devout religious believer who censors his thoughts and behaviours due to the all-seeing eye of god:

*“Gods, of course, are frequently described as being both omniscient and omnipotent. And it is not difficult to see why. If believers can be brought truly to believe that their God can see into their minds and hearts and to believe that He will punish them severely if He glimpses the slightest disloyalty, they may be persuaded to change their thinking and their feeling and become, internally and externally, more compliant and more obedient. For what must be overcome, the chief obstacle in the way of command hierarchies reaching their ideal typical form, is the human power to lie, pretend and assimilate. Citizens who have the ability to pretend loyalty and love while plotting disobedience and treason are serious threats to the security of any power that be. Only if people can be persuaded that their efforts to lie and pretend are rendered fruitless by an all-seeing eye, can. . . obedience become assured.” (Don Mixon, *Obedience and Civilization*)*

Societies which accept the need for mass surveillance, or allow it to spread through non-action and compliance, are societies which become increasingly unable to resist tyranny. Totalitarian regimes of the 20th century clearly recognized this as they all instituted forms of mass surveillance on their citizenry. However, modern technology has created surveillance capabilities that dictators, such as Hitler and Stalin could only have dreamt of. As these technologies are put to use, a prison of the mind, so to speak, will be constructed. Realizing that so much of one's life is being monitored, the surveillance capabilities of governments, like an all-seeing eye of god, will make thoughts and behaviors favoring compliance and conformity the norm.

While the tendency to obey is certainly a prominent feature of man, there are always a brave few who in the face of corrupt power are willing to stand up and refuse. Those with the courage to disobey are not only protectors of freedom but, as Erich Fromm suggested, individuals who move a society forward:

*“Man has continued to evolve by acts of disobedience. Not only was his spiritual development possible only because there were men who dared to say no to the powers that be in the name of their conscience or their faith, but also his intellectual development was dependent on the capacity for being disobedient, disobedient to authorities who tried to muzzle new thoughts and to the authority of long-established opinions which declared a change to be nonsense.” (Erich Fromm, *On Disobedience and Other Essays*)*



“Human predators populate our society.”

Stefan Verstappen, Defense Against the Psychopath

Psychopaths are human predators. They coerce, manipulate, lie, steal, defraud, abuse, and take life, without feeling guilt or remorse. A leading expert on psychopathy, Robert Hare, estimates that 1% of people are psychopaths; while the clinical psychologist Martha Stout suggests this figure is closer to 4%. Studies indicate that psychopaths are over-represented in the corporate executive world and in politics. In this video we are going to explore the psychology of the psychopath as this knowledge can help us minimize the damage they inflict on us, those we care about, and humanity at large.

“...compared with other major clinical disorders, little systematic research has been devoted to psychopathy, even though it is responsible for far more social distress and disruption than all other psychiatric disorders combined. Psychopaths are found in every segment of society, and there is a good chance that...you will have a painful or humiliating encounter with one. Your best defense is to understand the nature of these human predators.”

Robert Hare, Without Conscience

Individuals such as Ted Bundy, Charles Manson or Jeffrey Dahmer are who come to mind when most people think of the psychopath and while such individuals are psychopathic, they represent an extreme of this disorder. Most psychopaths, rather than committing violent crimes, engage in immoral acts that fly under the radar of the criminal justice system; they will abuse family

members, or neglect their well-being, they will cheat others out of money, pathologically lie, or manipulate others for selfish ends.

“...many people know nothing about this disorder, or if they do, they think only in terms of...people who have conspicuously broken the law many times over, and who, if caught, will be imprisoned...most [psychopaths] are not incarcerated. They are out here in the world with you and me.”

Martha Stout, The Sociopath Next Door

The reason most of us refrain from routinely exploiting and harming others is because we possess a conscience. We empathize with the suffering of others, and if we make another suffer, we feel guilt. Psychopaths have no conscience, and they lack the ability to feel empathy and guilt. In fact, a psychopath does not feel love, friendship, or any emotional connection to anyone at all. If psychopaths maintain ties to other people, it is only because they see them as a possession, resource or tool. This emotionless void which exists in the heart of the psychopath makes them capable of repeatedly engaging in acts that harm other people.

“Even experienced and case-hardened professionals find it unnerving when they see a psychopath’s reaction to a gut-wrenching event or listen to him or her casually describe a brutal offense as if an apple had been peeled or a fish gutted.”

Robert Hare, Without Conscience

Or as he continues:

“[The psychopath is] a self-centered, callous, and remorseless person profoundly lacking in empathy and the ability to form warm emotional relationships with others, a person who functions without the restraints of conscience. If you think about it, you will realize that what is missing in this picture are the very qualities that allow human beings to live in social harmony.”

Robert Hare, Without Conscience

In place of the emotional connections which create meaning in the lives of normal people, the internal life of the psychopath is driven by the pleasure-principle and the need for continual excitement. Many psychopaths are alcoholics, addicted to drugs or sex, and engage in highly risky behaviors. But the most seductive stimulant for a psychopath is power. No matter whether they are a career criminal, an unemployed freeloader, a middle manager, a CEO, a financier, bureaucrat, or politician, the mind of the psychopath is obsessed with controlling other people. Or as Martha Stout explains:

“The prize to be won can run the gamut from world domination to a free lunch, but it is always the same game—controlling, making others jump, “winning.””

Martha Stout, The Sociopath Next Door

Robert Hare shares a snippet from a psychological report about a psychopath named Earl:

“The most salient thing about Earl is his obsession with absolute power. He values people only insofar as they bend to his will or can be coerced or manipulated into doing

what he wants. He constantly sizes up his prospects for exploiting people and situations.”

Robert Hare, Without Conscience

While from our vantage point the psychopath is suffering from a severe mental disorder, psychopaths see nothing wrong with themselves and are sometimes forthright in stating that their “condition” is a blessing. Their lack of emotional attachments and inability to feel empathy and guilt grant them an unprecedented advantage in what is a dog-eat-dog world – or so they say. Ted Bundy, for example, referred to guilt as an “unhealthy social control mechanism” that “does terrible things to the body.” Given that they see their psychopathy as a benefit, it should come as no surprise that attempts to “rehabilitate” psychopaths fail miserably. In summarizing the literature on the so-called “treatments” for psychopathy, Robert Hare explains:

“...many writers on the subject have commented that the shortest chapter in any book on psychopathy should be the one on treatment. A one-sentence conclusion such as, “No effective treatment has been found,” or, “Nothing works,” is the common wrap-up to scholarly reviews of the literature.”

Robert Hare, Without Conscience

To make matters worse, psychopaths are notoriously difficult to identify. For although inwardly they are as different from us as night and day, outwardly they camouflage their predatory nature with what the 20th century psychiatrist Hervey Cleckley called a “mask of sanity”. Psychopaths are akin to predatory creatures who mimic the appearance and behaviour of their prey. In his article *Snake in the Grass*, the psychologist Daniel Jones explains that: “*There are spiders in Australia that smell and behave like ants: some are so convincing that the ants will allow a spider to live permanently as one of them. This spider will then feast upon its new friends, but it won’t eat all the ants, or even a significant number; instead, it extracts resources slowly, sustainably, and over time.*” (Daniel Jones, *Snake in the Grass*)

Like the Australian spider, on the social stage psychopaths often appear normal. In fact, they tend to be more charismatic, charming, and confident than most people. This social allure is partially a function of the fact that psychopaths experience far less stress, fear, and anxiety than the rest of us. But it is also the result of the psychopath’s remarkable capacity to lie about their past, their achievements, and their character in a manner which mesmerizes, and sometimes psychologically paralyzes, their victims.

“Most of the victims I have known in my work have reported that their initial involvement with a [psychopathic] person, and their continued association even though she or he caused them pain, was a direct result of how charming she or he could be. Countless times, I have watched people shake their heads and make statements such as, “He was the most charming person I ever met,” or “I felt like I’d known her forever,” or “He had an energy about him that other people just don’t have.”

Martha Stout, The Sociopath Next Door

Luckily, there are cracks in the psychopath’s mask of sanity. One of these cracks is a pathologically inflated sense of self-importance, which psychopaths find impossible to hide. Or as Robert Hare explains:

“Psychopaths have a narcissistic and grossly inflated view of their self-worth and importance, a truly astounding egocentricity and sense of entitlement, and see themselves as the center of the universe, as superior beings who are justified in living according to their own rules.”

Robert Hare, Without Conscience

The eyes of a psychopath can also reveal their predatory nature, as some victims report that looking into the eyes of a psychopath is akin to looking into the eyes of a reptile; no matter their mood, their eyes are the same – empty, cold, intense, and unsettling. This commonality between the eyes of a psychopath and the eyes of a reptile is one of the sources of the contemporary myth that there exists a race of reptilian humanoids.

“Some people respond to the emotionless stare of the psychopath with considerable discomfort, almost as if they feel like potential prey in the presence of a predator. Others may be completely overwhelmed and intimidated, perhaps even controlled, with little insight into what is happening to them. Whatever the psychological meaning of their gaze, it is clear that intense eye contact is an important factor in the ability of some psychopaths to manipulate and dominate others.”

Martha Stout, The Sociopath Next Door

Another way to see through the psychopath’s mask of sanity is to pay attention to their manner of speaking. Psychopaths find it difficult to maintain a coherent narrative; their statements are often contradictory and littered with inconsistencies. They tend to jump from one unrelated topic to the next, and when asked a question they are known to respond in a way that is irrelevant to what was asked.

“Psychopaths are notorious for not answering the question posed them or for answering in a way that seems unresponsive to the question.”

Robert Hare, Without Conscience

Some psychopaths also accompany their speech with exaggerated hand movements. Researchers believe the hand movements of a psychopath are a function of how their brain processes words, ideas, and emotions. But the hand movements also function as a deceptive strategy; they distract listeners and make it harder to catch onto their inconsistencies and lies. Regarding one psychopath undergoing a psychological assessment, Robert Hare explained:

“His narrative was accompanied by expansive hand movements and exaggerated facial expressions—a dramatic display that blinded our interviewer to what was happening.”

Robert Hare, Without Conscience

The root cause of psychopathy is unknown, but studies indicate that psychopaths are born with a predisposition to psychopathy; they are, in other words, a product of nature, not nurture.

“...there is no convincing body of findings linking the core characteristic of [psychopathy]—that is, the absence of conscience—with childhood maltreatment...In fact, there is some evidence that [psychopaths] are influenced less by their early experience than are [nonpsychopaths].”

Martha Stout, The Sociopath Next Door

While psychopaths have plagued all societies throughout history, the problem of their existence is amplified by contemporary trends toward political centralization. Governments are reaching their tentacles into ever more areas of life, global institutions are attempting to place the entire globe under the same yoke of tyranny, and developments in technology are creating the potential for a form of totalitarian rule that is far more invasive than anything that has come before. As psychopaths crave power, as they are naturally charismatic, skilled liars, and unconstrained by empathy, fear, anxiety, and guilt, it is reasonable to surmise that some psychopaths gravitate towards, or are actively established in, positions of political power. In his book *Political Ponerology*, the Polish psychiatrist Andrzej Łobaczewski proposed the name pathocracy for the type of political system in which psychopaths rule, and unless more people are aware of the threat of this predatory class, this type of rule may become a full-blown reality.

“I shall accept the denomination of pathocracy for a system of government...wherein a small pathological minority takes control over a society of normal people....if an individual in a position of political power is a psychopath, he or she can create an epidemic of psychopathology in people who are not, essentially, psychopathic...Under such conditions, no area of social life can develop normally, whether in economics, culture, science, technology, administration, etc. Pathocracy progressively paralyzes everything.”

Andrzej Łobaczewski, Political Ponerology



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The Psychology of Self-Sabotage and Resistance

“Most of us have two lives. The life we live, and the unlived life within us. Between the two stands Resistance.” ([The War of Art, Steven Pressfield](#))

At certain times in life we experience a calling from our higher self, urging us to move in the direction of a more noble life. This calling often presents itself in our darker moments and we are struck with the realization that we have but two choices before us: to live in a superior manner, or to continue down a dead-end path that will only lead to more frustration and misery. While this apparition of our higher self may supply us with temporary inspiration, we rarely obey its orders for long. Instead we sink back into our habitual ways and live in obedience to our base desires, apathy, and cynicism.

Many people do not heed the call from their higher self because deep down they know just how difficult answering such a call would be. In the words of Nietzsche, “they fear their higher self because, when it speaks, it speaks demandingly” (Nietzsche, *Human, all too Human*) They desire the fruits of success, confidence, and courage, which accompany self-evolution, but they are unwilling to undergo the discipline and pain needed to attain these fruits. What such individuals lack in this situation is ambition. Without kindling what the poet Holderlin called “the sacred fire within”, few would be willing to undergo the Herculean task of effecting positive self-change.

“Ambition, I have come to believe, is the most primal and sacred fundament of our being. To feel ambition and to act upon it is to embrace the unique calling of our souls. Not to act upon that ambition is to turn our backs on ourselves and on the reason for our existence.” ([Steven Pressfield, Turning Pro](#))

A lack of ambition, however, is not the only thing holding us back. Sick of wasting our life drowning in our sorrows and bad habits, times arise when we deeply desire nothing other than the opportunity to put in the hard work and discipline needed to live in a superior manner. Yet for some reason, we just can’t make any progress. We feel a strong pull from our higher self, but we feel a

stronger pull in the opposite direction, opposing our every attempt to take a step forward in the right direction. Steven Pressfield called this inner opposition Resistance, and warned that it is the greatest enemy we will ever face.

“Resistance is the most toxic force on the planet...To yield to Resistance deforms our spirit. It stunts us and makes us less than we are and were born to be....As powerful as is our soul’s call to realization, so potent are the forces of Resistance arrayed against it.”

([Steven Pressfield, The War of Art](#))

Resistance is the set of psychobehavioral patterns and habits which inhibit us from heeding the call of our higher self. Excuses, rationalizations, fears, laziness, depression, anxiety, procrastination, and the tendency to self-medicate, are all manifestations of Resistance. As Resistance is that which opposes any movement from a lower state of being to a higher one, unless we learn to overcome it, a life of mediocrity will be our destiny.

“Resistance’s goal is not to wound or disable. Resistance aims to kill. Its target is the epicenter of our being: our genius, our soul, the unique and priceless gift we were put on earth to give and that no one else has but us...When we fight it, we are in a war to the death.” ([Steven Pressfield, The War of Art](#))

Around 2300 years ago in what is now Northern China, a lineage of military leaders put their collective wisdom into written form, shaping what is now known as Sun Tzu’s The Art of War. While the primary intention of the text was to provide military leaders with insight on how to subdue their enemies, its profundity lies in the fact that it offers timeless wisdom on how to deal with any form of conflict and any type of enemy. Thus, for advice on how to overcome Resistance – the enemy within – we can turn to The Art of War for insight.

“If you know the enemy and know yourself, in one hundred battles no danger. If you know yourself but not the enemy, one victory for one loss. If you know neither the enemy nor yourself, in every battle certain defeat.” ([Sun Tzu, The Art of War](#))

As this ancient wisdom advises, to overcome Resistance and our tendency to self-sabotage, we must not ignore it or pretend it doesn’t exist, but study the typical traits it displays to better fortify ourselves against it.

The defining characteristic of Resistance is its universality. Whenever we use excuses to justify our slavish way of life, or allow apathy to define our days, we are engaging in tendencies which are universal and shared by all, even the most successful among us. It is not possible to eradicate Resistance from our life once and for all, instead we must see it as a part of human nature and learn to move forward in spite of its presence.

The reason Resistance is so hard to combat, and the tendency to self-sabotage so pervasive, is due to its Protean Nature. Resistance assumes many forms and changes so often that most of the time we are unaware of the ways it is opposing us. A particularly pernicious form that Resistance takes is the projecting of our internal Resistance onto people and situations. We then play the victim-role and blame those close to us, our job, society, the state of the world, or even Fate, for our mediocrity and misery. Projection is so damaging because it not only prevents us from taking the needed responsibility for our life, but it also harms our relationships with those close to us. To combat this tendency, Pressfield recommends we adopt the following mantra:

“Resistance arises from within. It is self-generated and self-perpetuated. Resistance is the enemy within.” ([The War of Art, Steven Pressfield](#))

While projection is certainly a dangerous form of Resistance, the most powerful manifestation comes in the form of fear. Fear in response to something potentially harmful is a natural and healthy response, but we do not only fear that which poses a threat to us, but also that which is our highest good. Abraham Maslow observed this feature of human nature, writing:

“We fear our highest possibilities...We are generally afraid to become that which we glimpse in our most perfect moments, under the most perfect conditions, under the conditions of the greatest courage.” ([Abraham Maslow, The Farther Reaches of Human Nature](#))

This highest good we fear Steven Pressfield called our “true calling”. To live in the service of such a calling is to centre our life around a form of productive work that we find challenging and intriguing. “The more scared we are of a work or calling, the more sure we can be that we have to do it.” (Steven Pressfield, *The War of Art*) With this knowledge we can utilize our fear, and let it guide us in the direction of our highest possibilities. “What you fear is an indication of what you seek.” (Thomas Merton), wrote the American writer Thomas Merton.

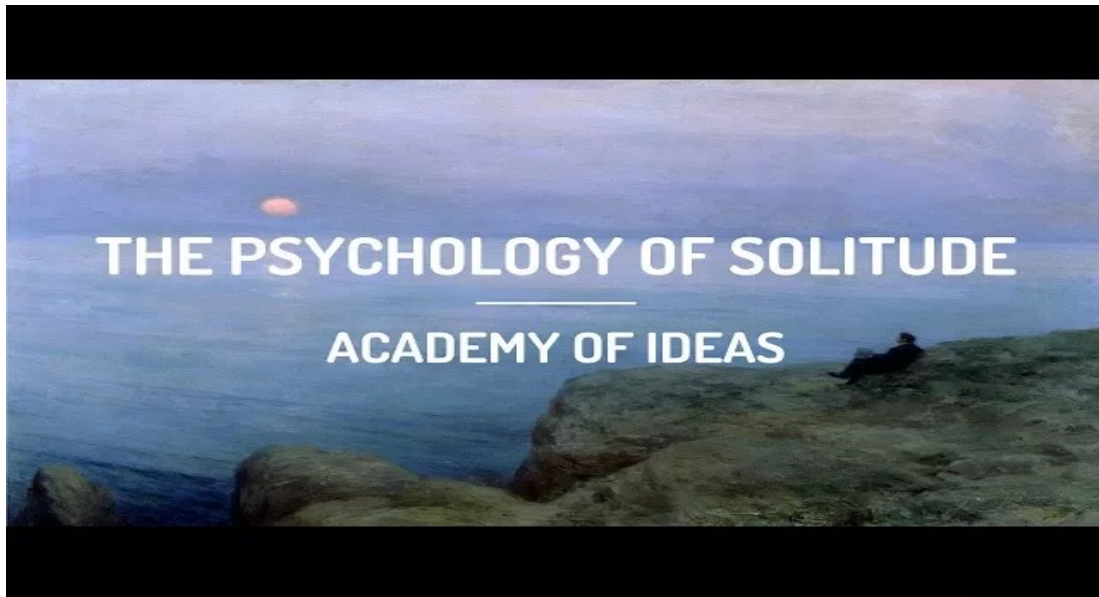
But once we have pinpointed the form of productive work most suitable to us there is only one thing to do: start taking action every single day for the sake of centering our life around our true calling. Yet as we do, we can be sure Resistance will be there every step of the way, and like the Sirens of Odysseus, it will try to lure us away from our life-mission in seductive and enchanting ways. But just as Odysseus was able to overcome the Sirens by having his sailors stick bee wax in their ears and by tying himself to the mast of his ship, it is possible for us to resist the temptations of Resistance. The importance of doing so, thought Pressfield, cannot be overstated. For the ability to master Resistance, day in and day out, is what differentiates those who have “turned pro” in their respective fields, from those who are forever doomed to remain nothing but “amateurs”.

“Turning pro is like kicking a drug habit or stopping drinking. It’s a decision, a decision to which we must re-commit every day. Each day, the professional understands, he will wake up facing the same demons, the same Resistance, the same self-sabotage...The difference is that now he will not yield to those temptations. He will have mastered them, and he will continue to master them.” ([Steven Pressfield, Turning Pro](#))



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“The fear of finding oneself alone – that is what they suffer from – and so they don’t find themselves at all.” ([Andre Gide, The Immoralist](#))

Human beings are social by nature and unfit to endure extreme cases of isolation. If we are alone for too long our mental faculties can degrade, leading to states of insanity and deep despair. The use of solitary confinement and exile are practices with ancient roots, indicating that people have long understood just how deeply the fear of isolation runs through our veins.

But in the modern day our fears are not restricted to extreme forms of isolation, rather many of us fear being alone for any extended period of time. In this video we’ll investigate this fear, explain the detrimental effects it can have on one’s relationships, and explore the benefits of overcoming this fear and learning to find solace in solitude.

Many thinkers have suggested that the fear of solitude is at root a fear of oneself. In our normal daily routines, busied with work and chores and most often in the presence of others, our social persona comes to the fore and frightening thoughts and emotions are pushed outside of our awareness. But when away from the restricting confines of others, these darker aspects of ourselves tend to rise to the surface and make their presence known.

“It is what one takes into solitude that grows there, the beast within included.”

([Nietzsche, Thus Spoke Zarathustra](#))

Hence, there is a danger in spending a significant amount of time isolated from others, as there will come a time when, broken down by the beast within, solitude will weigh us down and become a great curse.

There are some who can endure this crisis of solitude, and through a heroic effort tame and integrate the darkness within, but most would be destroyed by such a confrontation, which is why Nietzsche thought “many should be dissuaded from solitude.”([Nietzsche, Thus Spoke Zarathustra](#)) The default

response for those for whom solitariness is too heavy a weight to bear is to cling to others to ensure they never feel alone.

“One man runs to his neighbour because he is looking for himself, and another because he wants to lose himself. Your bad love of yourselves makes solitude a prison to you.”([Nietzsche, Thus Spoke Zarathustra](#))

Those who lose themselves in others may be saved from their solitude, but they always turn out to be crippled versions of the person they could have become. In order for us to actualize our potential we need to fulfill what the psychologist Abraham Maslow called our “metaneeds” or “highest needs”, which include the drive for truth, beauty, and goodness. These needs, as Ernest Becker noted in his book *The Denial of Death*, cannot be completely fulfilled by other people: “It is impossible to get blood from a stone, to get spirituality from a physical being.”([Ernest Becker, Denial of Death](#)) Any attempt to fulfill the totality of our metaneeds through an intimate relationship will result in a god-like idealization of the partner, and a resultant slavish dependence on them for our self-worth and identity.

“If the partner becomes God they can just as easily become the Devil; the reason is not far to seek...If you find the ideal love and try to make it the sole judge of good and bad in yourself, the measure of your strivings, you become simply the reflex of another person. You lose yourself in the other, just as obedient children lose themselves in the family. No wonder that dependency, whether of the god or the slave in the relationship, carries with it so much underlying resentment.” ([Ernest Becker, Denial of Death](#))

To ensure we don't, like many individuals today, fall victim to dependence-driven relationships we must develop what the 20th century psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott called “the capacity to be alone”. When the fear of solitude makes us dependent on others, we become overly compliant out of a fear of abandonment, and thus build up what Winnicott called a False Self, that is, our personality becomes a mere reflex of how we believe others want us to be. It is in developing the capacity to be alone that the False Self can be broken down, thought Winnicott, rendering us able to rediscover our True Self, or in other words, our authentic feelings and needs.

In the modern day most are oblivious to the benefits of solitude. Instead, many unknowingly adhere to what is called Object Relations Theory, which is based on two key assumptions: that the maturation of one's personality can only be facilitated through interpersonal relationships, and that these relationships are the primary, if not sole, source of meaning in life. In his influential work *Attachment and Loss*, John Bowlby, an adherent of this view, wrote:

“Intimate attachments to other human beings are the hub around which a person's life revolves, not only when he is an infant or toddler or school child but throughout his adolescence and his years of maturity as well, and on into old age.” ([John Bowlby, Attachment and Loss](#))

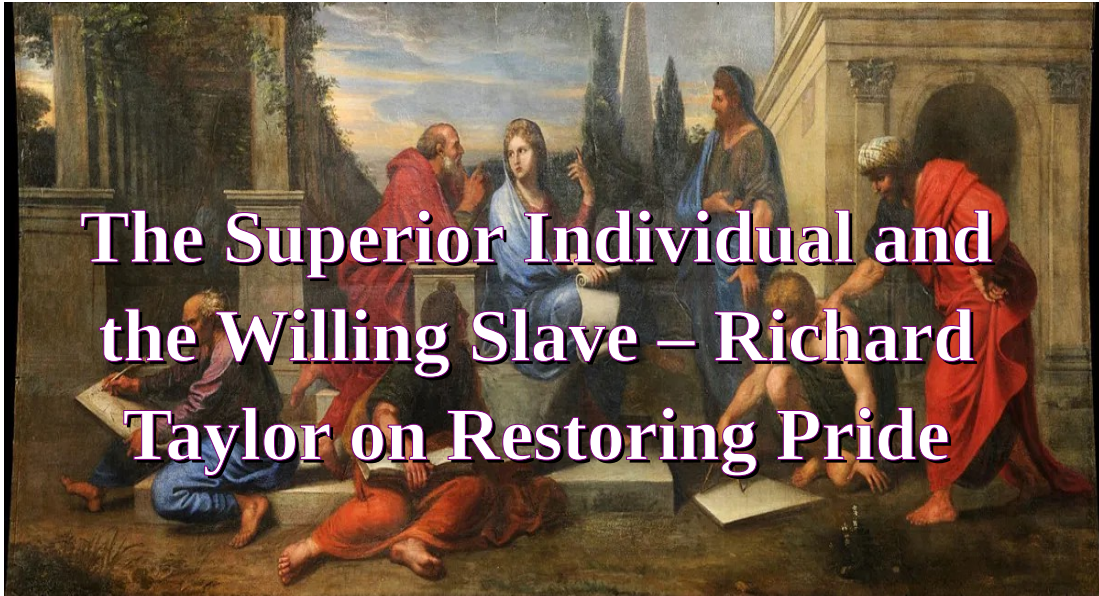
Taken to their extreme, the assumptions held by Object Relations Theorists imply that the individual's life has no meaning apart from interpersonal relationships, thus overlooking the well-established fact that meaning can be found and personal growth stimulated when we cultivate, in solitude, a relationship with some form of creative work that consumes our attention. As the 20th century psychiatrist Anthony Storr argued in his book *Solitude: A Return to the Self*, in the struggle to give form and order to an external creative work, we are also, often without knowing it, imposing form and order on our mind.

“...maturation and integration can take place within the isolated individual to a greater extent than I had allowed for...introverted creators are able to define identity and achieve self-realization by self-reference, that is, by interacting with their work rather than by interacting with other people. ([Anthony Storr, Solitude: A Return to the Self](#))

It is this ability to achieve self-realization by developing a relationship with our work that led the Russian author Fyodor Dostoevsky to claim solitude for the mind to be as essential as food is for the body. In solitude we can forge our character away from the often constricting external demands of others, and maintain our independence in the relationships we do cultivate, thus ensuring we do not, like many today, lose our identity in them.

Yet as we learn to flourish in solitude we must not dismiss the dangers of it which Nietzsche spoke of, dangers which led Goethe to write: “there is nothing more dangerous than solitude.” (Goethe, *The Sorrows of Young Werther*) We can increase our capacity to deal with these dangers, however, if we consider the possibility that the benefits of solitude are embedded in its dangers, meaning that it is only by voluntarily seeking out solitude and confronting the darkness within that we extract the benefits of being alone, and perhaps even eventually attain the rare self-confidence of one who has gained sovereignty over himself.

“...you should not let yourself be confused in your solitude by the fact that there is some thing in you that wants to move out of it...We know little, but that we must trust in what is difficult is a certainty that will never abandon us; it is good to be solitary, for solitude is difficult; that something is difficult must be one more reason for us to do it.” ([Rainer Maria Rilke, Letters to a Young Poet](#))



The Superior Individual and the Willing Slave – Richard Taylor on Restoring Pride

“The themes of this book result from years of observing people in my effort to understand why their lives take the directions they do. Some of these people have been men and women of great creative achievement while most, of course, have not...What is it, then, that sets the former part? The answer is, in short, that they invent their own lives, while the others fall into the lockstep of custom, thereby letting society more or less choose their lives for them. This latter approach to life I call “willing slavery.””

[Richard Taylor, Restoring Pride](#)

In 1995, the late American philosophy professor and bee-keeper Richard Taylor penned *Restoring Pride*, which to this day, remains perhaps the greatest and most underappreciated “self-help” book. The premise of Taylor’s book is, in his words, “the fact that some people are better as human beings than others.” In our age of egalitarian envy, this elitist mindset may sound like treason, but as Taylor points out:

“Everyone knows this is true, and while it may be good social policy to pretend otherwise, much is also lost.”

[Richard Taylor, Restoring Pride](#)

Taylor’s sublime book is currently out of print and increasingly difficult to find. For those unable to secure it, in this article we are going to provide a summary of some of Taylor’s key passages and ideas.

The Superior Human Being

What is a superior human being? Superior human beings differ among each other in a myriad of ways. However, the one virtue they all share in common is personal excellence. At some point in life, the superior human being discovers that he or she possesses an natural inclination for a subject,

skill, vocation, or profession, and from that point on, dedicates his or her life to the cultivation of personal excellence in that field.

“Thus the proud rise above ordinary people, and are quite literally superior to them; but their superiority rests not on class, power, or wealth, but on being gifted in some way and then applying those gifts to personal achievement.”

[Richard Taylor, *Restoring Pride*](#)

The Reward of Personal Excellence – Pride and Authentic Self-Love

Personal excellence is difficult to achieve as it requires creativity, persistence, and years of hard work and practice. So clearly there must be worthwhile rewards bestowed upon those who attain it. What are the rewards associated with personal excellence?

Some superior human beings attain fame; some accumulate a little, or a lot, of money. However, other superior human beings remain unknown for their entire lives and may not even make a penny from their efforts. But while the rewards of recognition or wealth are nice if attained, such rewards are trivial in comparison with the one reward that all superior human beings are guaranteed: that is, pride and the self-love that accompanies the knowledge that one has done, and is continually doing, something significant and meaningful with their life.

“The reward of personal excellence is not fame, but pride. You are proud, not because of the applause of others, or even the applause of the whole world, but because of what you genuinely are – provided, of course, that you are gifted in some significant way and that you do something with that gift.”

[Richard Taylor, *Restoring Pride*](#)

Merely to do what others have done is often safe, and comfortable; but to do something truly original, and do it well, whether it is appreciated by others or not – that is what being human is really all about, and it is what alone justifies the self-love that is pride.

[Richard Taylor, *Restoring Pride*](#)

“Personal excellence, therefore, requires no recognition, no authentication by others. More than this, it need not even be recognizable; that is, a person’s worth often rests upon some strength or ability which the world might not recognize as of much value even when clearly displayed. Genius, even great genius, can be in small things, and things that most persons might regard as even insignificant. What is required for personal excellence is that its possessor be able to do something with extraordinary skill. It need not be some great or dramatic thing.”

[Richard Taylor, *Restoring Pride*](#)

The Inferior Human Being – The Willing Slave

If personal excellence and pride are the mark of the superior human being, then unquestioned conformity to social norms and customs is the mark of the inferior human being, whom Richard Taylor called the “willing slave”.

“What is it, then, that sets the [superior human being] apart? The answer is, in short, that they invent their own lives, while the others fall into the lockstep of custom, thereby letting society more or less choose their lives for them. This latter approach to life I call “willing slavery.””

[Richard Taylor, Restoring Pride](#)

“Indeed, to the extent that your actions and pursuits are your responses to the will and the approval of other people, you are the very opposite of a proud person, for you are the slave of others. A willing slave, to be sure – but a slave, still.”

[Richard Taylor, Restoring Pride](#)

“Slaves, even willing slaves, have no place on those paths that can lead to great and sometimes lasting achievement, for the paths themselves are the creations of those who have forged them. To the extent that you embark upon a path handed to you ready-made, you have excluded from yourself, however praiseworthy you may be in the eyes of those who have led you that way, any possibility of achieving an excellence that can be called your own. And this means that you have forfeited any chance for personal excellence. You will have to derive your satisfactions from the applause of others, and this may – indeed, probably will – lead you to applaud yourself, though you really have no right to do so...Epictetus was right: if you say “Master!” from the heart and with feeling – which today would mean, if you kneel, bow, or defer even to someone of immense stature and power – then you are slave even though, perhaps, a rich and blessed slave. Freedom is measured not by what you own, and not by any visible glory that you can claim, but solely by your heeding your own will with respect to what is important to you.”

[Richard Taylor, Restoring Pride](#)

To be a Superior Human Being, or to be a Willing Slave? That is the Question.

As Nietzsche pointed out, no matter how tempting it is to play the role of the victim, ultimately we must take into account that we have but a brief flicker of time on this earth, and what we choose to do with it, is our responsibility alone.

“There is the inexplicable factor that we live precisely today, when we had infinite time during which to come into existence, that we possess only a brief today during which to show why and to what end we have come into existence precisely now. We are responsible to ourselves for our own existence. One has to take a rather bold and dangerous line with it – especially since, in the best as in the worst cases, we are bound to lose it.”

[Nietzsche, Untimely Meditations](#)

Given that we are responsible for our own existence, how are we going to spend our time. Are we going to spend it as a willing slave, and blindly follow social norms and customs all the while weaving excuses and self-deceptions to save us from the realization that we are wasting our talents and life? Or are we going to grab hold of the reins of our existence and pursue personal excellence, with the goal of joining the ranks of the superior human beings – the rightfully proud?

Richard Taylor became a superior human being through the cultivation of excellence in the fields of philosophy and bee-keeping. In which domains will you choose to pursue personal excellence?

When we think of creativity, we are apt to construe it narrowly as the creation of things, sometimes even limiting it to things belonging to the arts. But this is arbitrary. Creative intelligence is exhibited by a dancer, by athletes, by a chess player, and indeed in virtually any activity guided by intelligence. In some respects the very paradigm of creative activity is the establishment of a brilliant position in the game of chess, even though what is created is of limited worth. Nor do such activities need to be the kind normally thought of as intellectual. For example, the exercise of skill in a profession, or in business, or even in such things as gardening and farming, or the rearing of a beautiful family, are all displays of creative intelligence. They can be done badly or well and are always done best when not by rule, rote, or imitation but with successful originality. Nor is it hard to see that, in referring to such commonplace activities as these, at the same time we touch upon some of the greatest and most lasting sources of human happiness....

Even the least creative among us are usually capable of something original, however innocuous it might be. But what is sad is the kind of happiness that is within the reach only of human beings should be attained by so few of them. And what is sadder still is that those who have no clear idea of what happiness is, or worse, themselves lack the resources to capture it, do not care. It is, in some ways, almost as if they had not ever been born.

Richard Taylor, Restoring Pride



“Fatherlessness is the leading cause of declining child well-being in our society. It is also the engine driving our most urgent social problems...Yet, despite its scale and social consequences, fatherlessness is a problem that is frequently ignored or denied.”

David Blankenhorn, Fatherless America

Families are microcosms of society. Strong and stable families contribute to social flourishing, while dysfunctional families push society in the direction of breakdown. More than at any point in history, the family unit is broken as a significant number of children are growing up without a father. In this video, drawing from the research of the American sociologist David Popenoe, we explore how absent fathers are harming children and destroying society, and how this problem can be solved.

“Based on the evidence, a strong case can be made that paternal deprivation, in the form of the physical, economic, and emotional unavailability of fathers to their children, has become the most prevalent form of child maltreatment today...fathers are vanishing from family life and only mothers are left to care about the children. And mothers...are not enough.”

David Popenoe, Families Without Fathers

Approximately 40% of children are born to unmarried mothers. Over 50% of marriages end in divorce, with the mother, more often than not, being granted custody of the children. Even in families where the father is physically present, many are not emotionally present in the lives of the children. Many fathers are addicted to their smartphones, or to drugs or alcohol. Others are forced

to work long hours, or multiple jobs, to provide for their family in the face of the ever-declining purchasing power of money. But whether emotionally or physically absent, the problem of absent fathers has reached endemic proportions and a mother cannot fill a fatherless void. For men and women possess innate biological differences that translate into different, yet complementary, parenting styles. Women are more compassionate and relationship oriented, while men are more competitive, aggressive, and oriented towards risk-taking and self-reliance. Mothers provide children with a nurturing, safe, and emotionally secure environment; while fathers challenge their children, push their boundaries, and help them cultivate autonomy. As psychological health is contingent on adequately satisfying the need for both independence and relatedness, challenge and emotional security, risk taking and safety, a developing child needs to be exposed to both the paternal and maternal worlds, or as Popenoe explains:

“The significance of gender-differentiated parenting undoubtedly is related to something fundamental in the human condition... Parental androgyny is not what children need. Males and females bring different qualities to children... The burden of social science evidence supports the idea that gender-differentiated parenting is important for human development and that the contribution of fathers to childrearing is unique and irreplaceable.”

David Popenoe, Families Without Fathers

Unfortunately, stepfathers are not a reliable solution to the problem of fatherlessness, as stepchildren are often worse off than children of single mothers. The lack of genetic ties can make a stepfather reluctant to invest time, energy, and resources into the child's development, and some stepfathers are prone to seeing their stepchildren as competition for the mother's attention.

“One of the surprising findings of family-related research in recent years is that the presence of stepfathers may actually aggravate childrearing problems and thereby increase the level of negative child outcomes.”

David Popenoe, Families Without Fathers

In two of his books, *Families without Fathers* and *The War over the Family*, David Popenoe summarizes the abundance of studies which demonstrate that children who grow up without a physically present and emotionally committed biological father are at a greater risk of suffering from emotional, behavioral, and physical health problems. They are less likely to succeed educationally, more likely to be socially impaired, and as adults more prone to dysfunctional relationships. Girls of absent fathers are more likely to become single teen mothers. Boys are more likely to become criminals and moral deviants. This list only scratches the surface of the known negative outcomes of growing up absent a father.

“Indeed, almost anything bad that can happen to a child occurs with much greater frequency to the children of divorce and those who live in single-parent families.”

David Popenoe, Families Without Fathers

Following divorce, the quality and quantity of the time that children spend with their fathers sharply declines. In the book *Divided Families*, Frank Furstenberg and Andrew Cherlin explain that after a few years of a divorce only one in ten children have weekly contact with their fathers, while two thirds have no contact at all. Yet even with divorced fathers who maintain contact, most often it is

sporadic and superficial and of little to no benefit to the child. In other words, while the mother-child bond is a primal bond that is rarely if ever broken, a man's bond to his children is heavily dependent on whether he is still in a relationship with the mother.

“Men tend to view marriage and childrearing as a single package. If their marriage deteriorates, their fathering deteriorates. If they are not married or are divorced, their interest in and sense of responsibility toward children greatly diminish.”

David Popenoe, Families Without Fathers

It is because men tend to view marriage and fatherhood as a single package that virtually every society in history has placed great emphasis on the institution of marriage, the primary function of which is to create socially binding ties which hold a man to his wife, for the benefit of the children. Or as Popenoe writes:

“Men have the capacity to father but also the capacity to stray...so all successful societies have imposed social sanctions on men to encourage their fathering behavior. By far the most important of these sanctions is the institution of marriage, the most universally found social institution of all...”

David Popenoe, Families Without Fathers

Up until the mid-20th century, marriage was held to be a sacred contract between a man and woman that was only broken in the most extreme of situations. Since then, the institution of marriage has rapidly deteriorated. Today many people avoid marriage, and of those who do marry, divorce is the statistical norm.

“...if one were specifically to design a culture and a social system for the express purpose of undercutting marriage and fatherhood and men's contribution to family life, our current society would be close to what would result.”

David Popenoe, Families Without Fathers

The sexual revolution, which commenced in the 1960s, was a major factor in the decline of marriage. Under the guise of sexual liberation, promiscuity was normalized, and with more females willing to engage in low-commitment sexual relations, more men renounced monogamy and marriage in favor of sleeping around. The damage that the sexual revolution inflicted on marriage, fatherhood, and the family, was one of its intended outcomes. In summarizing the ideas of Wilhelm Reich and Herbert Marcuse, two of the intellectual drivers of the sexual revolution, Carl Trueman explains:

“Sex focused on procreation and family is the repressive weapon of bourgeois capitalist society. And free love and untrammelled sexual experimentation are a central part of the revolutionary liberation of society...To transform society politically...one must transform society sexually...the sexual mores of late capitalism, focused as they are on the maintenance of monogamy and the patriarchal family, are actually no longer as necessary as they once were.”

Carl Trueman, The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self

A societal-wide deterioration in values has also weakened the institution of marriage. Responsibility and commitment to others have fallen by the wayside and been replaced by a narcissistic obsession with ego-fulfillment. While in the past the main function of marriage was to create an economic and reproductive partnership for the sake of raising healthy children, today marriage is seen almost exclusively as a vehicle for satisfying one's needs and desires, and the myth that romantic love can solve one's problems remains pervasive. When feelings of infatuation or love wane, therefore, or when a partner feels unfulfilled or incomplete, then divorce – even when children are involved – has become the socially approved solution. Or as Popenoe writes:

“...it was not so long ago that the divorce revolution was given a strangely positive cast in popular culture. If breaking up is better for parents, it was thought, it cannot be all that bad for children. What keeps parents happy should also keep children happy. How can an idea so wrongheaded have been so pervasive? In part, of course, it was a convenient, guilt-retarding rationalization for parents who were breaking up.”

David Popenoe, Families Without Fathers

Clearly, an abusive or highly dysfunctional marriage should end for the sake of all involved. However, for the problem of the absent father to be solved there needs to be a revitalization in the institution of marriage and a reemphasis on the fact that the main reason marriage developed in the first place was to benefit children, not to fulfill or complete the adult partners.

“Society, in its wisdom, has recognized that in order to hold the father to the mother and child a cultural tie had to be developed where a biological tie was weak....[marriage] is society's way of signaling to would-be parents of children that their long-term relationship together is socially important.”

David Popenoe, Families Without Fathers

While marriage benefits children, committed fatherhood promotes the well-being and fulfillment of men. Family life motivates men to positively channel their aggressive energy, become socially productive, and cultivate the virtues of honesty, trust, self-sacrifice, and discipline, that are necessary to support, and become a role model for, their children. In his book *A Sense of Well-Being*, the psychologist Angus Campbell notes that in terms of overall life satisfaction the most well-off males are fathers of grown children who are still married to their wives. The unhappiest, on the other hand, are divorced men and unattached men who have no wife or children. As men have more difficulty forming social relationships than women, a man without a wife and children is often a man without any close relationships at all.

“It is not just that particularly healthy and competent and morally upright persons are more likely to marry, but that marriage actually promotes health, competence, virtue, and personal well-being...There is a civilizing effect for men in merely being in the company of women and children, an environment which typically promotes life-enhancing values...With the continued growth of fatherlessness...we can expect to see a nation of men who are at worst morally out of control and at best unhappy, unhealthy, and unfulfilled.”

David Popenoe, Families Without Fathers

But it is children who suffer the most from an absent father, and as children are the future of society, society suffers by extension. Absent fathers translate into broken children, and broken children are at risk of growing up to be broken men and women who perpetuate societal dysfunction.

“What society does to its children, so will its children do to society.”

Cicero, De Officiis

And so as Popenoe concludes:

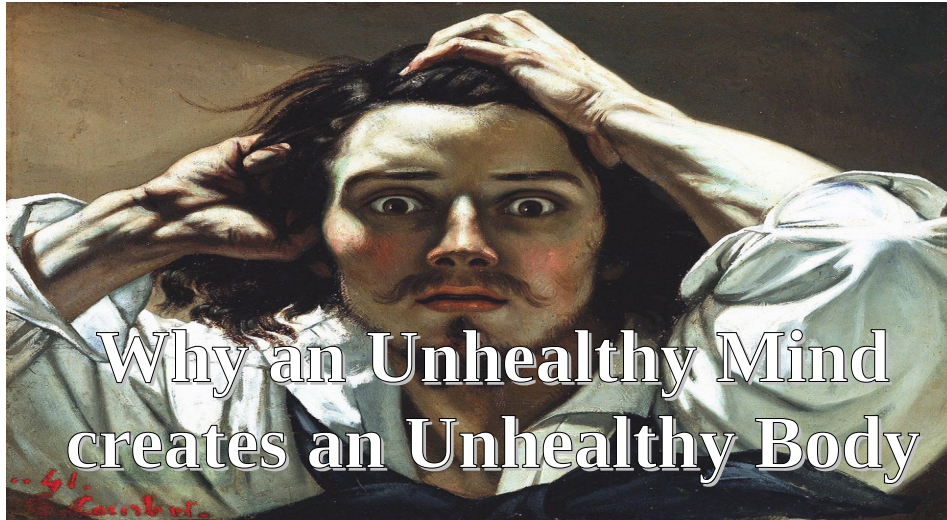
“...strong families with involved fathers in life-long marriages are irreplaceable for a strong and stable moral order, for adult well being, and ultimately for the well being and success in life of their children....If we continue down the path of fatherlessness, we are headed for social disaster...In the final analysis, every father counts.”

David Popenoe, Families Without Fathers



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“The great majority of us are required to live a life of constant, systematic duplicity. Your health is bound to be affected if, day after day, you say the opposite of what you feel, if you grovel before what you dislike and rejoice at what brings you nothing but misfortune. Our nervous system isn’t just a fiction, it’s part of our physical body . . . It can’t be forever violated with impunity.”

Boris Pasternak, Doctor Zhivago

Chronic health problems sap the joy from life. Whether suffering from a serious condition like cancer or heart disease or from ailments of a body subjected to years of stress, to live a vibrant life, we must heal the body. In this two-part video series, we explore how our mindset, and the state of our character, can make us sick, but also heal us. In this first video we explore how negative thought patterns, unresolved emotional states, stress, and trauma, can lead to disease, illness, and even premature death.

“I’ve come to believe that virtually all illness, if not psychosomatic in foundation, has a definite psychosomatic component.”

Candace Pert, Molecules of Emotion

Most of us intuitively recognize that there exists a tight coupling between body and mind. So intimate is the relationship that it may be better to view the mind and body as two-sides of the same coin, or as a unitary phenomenon, rather than as two separate entities. Or as Carl Jung wrote:

“The distinction between mind and body is an artificial dichotomy. . . In fact, so intimate is the intermingling of bodily and psychic traits that not only can we draw far-reaching inferences as to the constitution of the psyche from the constitution of the body, but we can also infer from psychic peculiarities the corresponding bodily characteristics.”

Carl Jung, Psychological Types

Most of us also recognize that the state of our mind can influence the health or sickness of our body. For example, it is well known that high levels of stress inhibit the immune system and increase the likelihood of sickness, and that excessive anxiety disrupts the functioning of the gut. While the mind-body connection is so obvious that to deny it is to defy common sense, the mainstream medical industry tends to overlook its influence. Doctors rarely consider to what degree an individual's sickness is a result of disturbances of mind or character, and through such ignorance the medical establishment blinds itself to preventative and curative measures.

"There is nothing novel about the notion of the mind and body being intricately linked;" wrote the physician and author Gabor Maté "if anything, what is new is the belief, tacitly held and overtly enacted by many well-meaning doctors, that they are separable."

Gabor Maté, The Myth of Normal

While the mainstream medical industry, and the scientific establishment at large, devote far more time and resources to studying how our biology and chemistry lead to the onset of disease, there is a large and growing body of research that reveals the role the mind plays in generating and perpetuating sickness. For example, there is research on the nocebo effect, which is the opposite of the well-known placebo effect. The placebo effect occurs when a person's health improves after taking an inert substance, such as a sugar pill, or undergoing a non-therapeutic treatment. Improvement in these cases, is often attributed to the mistaken, but beneficial belief, that the placebo has healing properties. Conversely, the nocebo effect occurs when negative expectations or beliefs induce a negative health outcome. Or as the medical doctor Lissa Rankin writes in *Mind Over Medicine*:

"The more you focus on the infinite ways in which the body can break down, the more likely you are to experience physical symptoms. Scientists call this phenomenon the nocebo effect."

Lissa Rankin, Mind over Medicine

Voodoo death is an ancient analogue of the nocebo effect and occurs in cultures with a strong belief in the power of curses and spells. In such cultures, when a powerful individual, such as a shaman, curses someone the intense fear and distress this evokes in the cursed individual can lead to a rapid death. Herbert Basedow describes a case of voodoo death among the Aboriginal peoples of Australia:

"A man who realizes that he is being pointed out with the magic bone makes a pitiful impression. He is perplexed, his eyes staring at the dreaded bone, he stretches out his hands as if to stave off a deadly force that seeks to penetrate his body. His face turns white and his eyes become glassy, the expression on his face is hideously distorted, like a person suddenly paralyzed. . . After a while, he recovers somewhat and crawls to his cabin. From then on, he withers away and becomes increasingly ill, refusing to eat and taking no part in any of the tribe's daily activities. Unless there is another shaman to undo the curse, he will die within a short period of time."

Henri Ellenberger, The Discovery of the Unconscious

While voodoo deaths do not occur in the modern West, there is a related phenomenon the medical doctor Andrew Weil in his book *Spontaneous Healing* calls medical hexing. Medical hexing occurs when an individual diagnosed with a serious illness, is presented with grim statistics of survival, suggesting they only have so many weeks, months, or years to live. After being presented with this information many people will go on to die “on schedule”. Medical hexing is not simply a case of a terminal illness running its natural course. Instead, it points to the ability of the mind to influence matters of life or death. For there are cases of individuals who are misdiagnosed with a terminal illness, but who still die in line with the prognostic schedule presented to them, or as Lissa Rankin writes:

“The literature shows that patients believed to be terminal who are mistakenly informed that they have only a few months to live have died within their given time frame, even when autopsy findings reveal no physiological explanation for the early death.”

Lissa Rankin, Mind over Medicine

The cardiologist Herbert Benson notes that many surgeons possess an intuitive sense of the power of thoughts and expectations on matters of life and death, or as he said in an interview to *The Washington Post*:

“Surgeons are wary of people who are convinced that they will die. There are examples of studies done on people undergoing surgery who almost want to die to re-contact a loved one. Close to 100 percent of people under those circumstances die.”

Brian Reid, “The Nocebo Effect: Placebo’s Evil Twin,” The Washington Post, April 30, 2002

Our mindset and the overall state of our character also contributes to the onset and progression of chronic disease. In the book *The Myth of Normal*, Mate explores how chronic stress, maladaptive forms of emotional processing, and trauma elevate the risk for cancer, heart disease, autoimmune diseases, and other chronic ailments.

“Stress can show up in two forms:” writes Mate “as an immediate reaction to a threat or as a prolonged state induced by external pressures or internal emotional factors. While acute stress is a necessary reaction that helps maintain our physical and mental integrity, chronic stress, ongoing and unrelieved, undermines both.”

Gabor Maté, The Myth of Normal

While we all experience the hardships, adversities, and challenges that trigger acute stress, chronic stress is typically a product of our character and mindset. Chronic stress, in other words, arises not merely from what happens to us, but also from how we react to the challenges we face. Courage, resilience, the seeking of wisdom and self-knowledge, and habits which elicit the relaxation response, all decrease the chance of being caught in the web of chronic stress. On the other hand, a lack of these character traits and habits increases our chance of being chronically stressed out, which primes our body for all sorts of illness, or as Mate writes:

“Over the long term, such a hormonal surplus [as caused by chronic stress]. . . can make us anxious or depressed; suppress immunity; promote inflammation; narrow blood vessels, promoting vascular disease throughout the body; encourage cancer growth; thin the bones; make us resistant to our own insulin, inducing diabetes; contribute to abdominal obesity, elevating the risk of cardiovascular and metabolic problems; impair essential cognitive and emotional circuits in the brain; and elevate blood pressure and increase blood clotting, raising the risk of heart attacks or strokes.”

Gabor Maté, The Myth of Normal

How we relate to the so-called negative emotions of sadness, depression, anger, guilt, fear, and shame, is another key pathway modulating the influence of the mind on chronic disease. The healthy manner of approach to a negative emotion is to permit the expression of the emotion, to process it, but then to make whatever life changes are necessary to prevent these emotions from becoming chronic. The unhealthy approach is to suppress, repress, or numb ourselves to the existence of the negative emotion, and to fail to make the changes required to prevent the emotional state from continually recurring long after the initial triggering event. Those who adopt the unhealthy approach greatly increase their risk of developing a chronic disease.

In *The Myth of Normal* Mate examines a wealth of scientific studies which reveal the danger of adopting a maladaptive relationship to our emotions. For example, a study at King’s College Hospital in London found “. . .that women with cancerous breast lumps characteristically exhibited “extreme suppression of anger and of other feelings” in “a significantly higher proportion” than the control group, which was made up of women admitted for biopsy at the same time but found to have benign breast tumors.” (Gabor Maté, *The Myth of Normal*) Studies on rheumatoid arthritis have discovered that “rheumatoid arthritis-prone individuals [display] an array of self-abnegating traits: a “compulsive and self-sacrificing doing for others, suppression of anger, and excessive concern about social acceptability.”” (Gabor Maté, *The Myth of Normal*)

Trauma is another factor that influences the development of chronic disease. The mechanism through which this occurs is the internal changes that result from the traumatic event, for as Mate notes “trauma is about what happens inside us, and how those effects persist. . .” Trauma leads to the mental agony of fear, guilt, shame, depression, and self-hate, and these mental states wreak havoc on the body. For example, Mate points to a study performed at the University of Toronto that revealed that men who had experienced a serious trauma as children were three times more likely to die from a heart attack and this was after normalizing for other contributing factors like alcohol or drug addictions.

“No matter how sophisticated our minds may be, the fact remains that their basic contents—what we think, believe consciously or unconsciously, feel or are prevented from feeling—powerfully affect our bodies, for better or worse.”

Gabor Maté, The Myth of Normal

Recognizing the role that our mind, and the overall state of our character, plays in the onset of sickness, is not to cast blame on those who develop a chronic disease. Most people do not voluntarily adopt a mindset that predisposes them to illness and often it is events from infancy and childhood, that are far beyond one's control, that set the stage for future suffering. What recognition of the influence of mind on body should do, is empower us. For just as the mind can make us sick, it can also heal us, and in part two of this series we explore the body's natural capacity to heal and look at how it is influenced by our mindset and the state of our character.

“What if the key to health isn't just eating a nutritious diet, exercising daily, maintaining a healthy weight, getting eight hours of sleep, taking your vitamins, balancing your hormones, or seeing your doctor for regular checkups?” writes Lissa Rankin. “Certainly, these are all important, even critical, factors to optimizing your health. But what if something else is even more important? What if you have the power to heal your body just by changing how your mind thinks, your heart feels, and your life force flows?”

Lissa Rankin, Mind over Medicine



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“And the word “courage” should be reserved to characterize the man or woman who leaves the infantile sanctuary of the mass mind.”

Sam Keen, Fire in the Belly

In the privacy of our minds many of us disagree with the ideologies, political agendas, and government mandates of our day, yet in public we comply. We do what we are told, say what is politically correct, and justify our hypocrisy by telling ourselves that we are powerless to change society, and so we might as well blend in with the crowd. In this video, we explain why publicly conforming to what we privately disagree with makes us complicit in tyranny, and why each of us has far more power to influence society than we have been led to believe.

In the 1950s, the social psychologist Solomon Asch conducted an experiment which demonstrated the degree to which individuals will reject what they think is true in order to conform to the majority. In the experiment, Asch showed a test subject two cards. On the first card was a single line, and on the second card were three lines, A, B, and C, with only line C being the same length as the line on the first card. Asch instructed the test subject to state which line on the second card was the same length as the line on the first card. However, before the test subject gave an answer, they witnessed 7 confederates – or individuals who were in on the experiment – state that line B was the same length as the line on the first card. Rather than state the obvious truth, the test subjects gave the same wrong answer as the group 37% of the time, and of the 123 test subjects who took part in this experiment, two thirds went along with the group at least once. Asch’s experiment confirms what philosophers have been reiterating for thousands of years: for most human beings conforming to what others say and do – no matter how objectively false or absurd – takes precedence over adapting to reality and discovering the truth. In reflecting on Asch’s experiment, the psychologist Todd Rose explains:

“...we care about being in the numerical majority even when we don’t necessarily care about the group and even when the group opinion is merely an illusion. Acting on instinct, in social situations our brains don’t actually bother to make the distinction between appearance and reality...Even in the absence of intentional pressure or incentives, we like to go along with what we think is the consensus because, quite simply, we’re biologically wired to do so.”

Todd Rose, Collective Illusions

Our inclination to go along with what we think is the consensus makes us vulnerable to propaganda and easily manipulated. For one of the primary ways that governments, corporations, and global institutions influence public opinion and shape mass behavior is by manufacturing illusions of consensus. They harness the power of the mainstream media and social media for the express purpose of making it seem as if the majority supports certain agendas, ideologies, and mandates. Slanted narratives, biased reports, rhetoric that appeals to emotion, misleading “fact checks”, outright lies, dubious opinion polls, and social bots are some of the weapons used in this subtle form of psychological warfare. Todd Rose heads an organization which investigates the misconceptions that people hold regarding what is the consensus on social and political issues, and as he explains:

“Name anything that truly matters to you, and I’ll wager that you are flat-out wrong about what the majority of people really think about at least half of them. And that’s being generous.”

Todd Rose, Collective Illusions

These illusions of consensus lead many of us to censor our real opinions, and to comply with socially destructive agendas and ideologies. Todd Rose references a study conducted in July of 2020 which revealed that nearly two thirds of Americans are not comfortable voicing their political opinions in public. But to make matters worse, when others see us conforming in public, they assume that we agree with what we are conforming to, and this heightens their inclination to conform and opens the door for collective illusions to form and spread throughout society. Or as Todd Rose explains:

“Collective illusions are social lies. They occur in situations where a majority of individuals in a group privately reject a particular opinion, but they go along with it because they (incorrectly) assume that most other people accept it. The result is a pernicious, self-fulfilling prophecy. By making blind and ultimately false assumptions about the opinions of those around us and worrying that we are in the minority, we become more likely to perpetuate the very views we and others do not hold. Worse, because the very same people who disagree with the status quo are the ones enforcing it, it becomes all but impossible to dismantle the illusion.”

Todd Rose, Collective Illusions

Collective illusions play a critical role in the rise and solidification of tyranny. To illustrate how this dynamic plays out, and how it can be stopped, we can turn to the allegory of the greengrocer from Vaclav Havel’s book, *The Power of the Powerless*.

In Communist Czechoslovakia, there was a man who sold fruit and vegetables in a corner store. Each morning he hung a government-endorsed sign in the window which read “Workers of the World, Unite!”. The greengrocer did not believe in the message of the sign – to him it was nothing more than cliché propaganda. After decades of harsh political oppression, it was clear to him that the government’s alleged concern for the workers of the world was an ideological front to conceal their thirst for power. Yet even though the greengrocer knew that the sign was propaganda, each morning he hung the sign anyways, because that’s what everyone else did. Government-endorsed signs hung in the window of every shop; they formed a part of what Vaclav Havel called “the panorama of everyday life” which helped to create, and sustain, the collective illusion that the majority supported the government. And it was this collective illusion of consensus, more than any other factor, which secured mass compliance. Or as Timothy Snyder explains in the Introduction to *The Power of the Powerless*:

“The greengrocer hangs his sign not because he receives an order, but because he sees that others do likewise. Others, in turn, follow his example. The system is totalitarian not because some individual has total power, but because power is shared in conditions of total irresponsibility.”

Timothy Snyder, Introduction to The Power of the Powerless

Or as Havel explained:

“...without the greengrocer’s slogan the office worker’s slogan could not exist, and vice versa...by exhibiting their slogans, each compels the other to accept the rules of the game and to confirm thereby the power that requires the slogans in the first place. Quite simply, each helps the other to be obedient...In the totalitarian system everyone in his or her own way is both a victim and a supporter of the system.”

Václav Havel, The Power of the Powerless

One day, the greengrocer decided he was sick of supporting an authoritarian government, and so he stopped hanging the sign in his window. What is more, he stopped voting in what he considered to be farcical elections, stopped regurgitating government propaganda, and started to publicly express his real opinions. These seemingly simple acts initiated a remarkable ripple effect, for as Todd Rose writes:

“...surprisingly, with amazing speed, the greengrocer began to gain support for the simple reason that everyone else in the city felt exactly the same way he did. Tired of living under oppression, the tailor and the baker and the office worker followed his lead. The moment the greengrocer stopped cooperating, he sent a signal to everyone else that they could do likewise.”

Todd Rose, Collective Illusions

The story of the greengrocer is a personification allegory; he represents all the individuals in communist Czechoslovakia whose noncompliant actions helped destroy the collective illusion of consensus support upon which the entire edifice of tyranny was built. The destruction of this collective illusion culminated in the Velvet Revolution, one of the only historical occurrences of a peaceful revolution which toppled an oppressive regime. How this revolution came to be, and how it achieved such profound political change in just 11 days, puzzles some historians. However, what

is often overlooked is the fact that the seeds of this revolution were planted in the years prior by all the unsung heroes of Czechoslovakia whose behavior was patterned in accordance with the allegory of the greengrocer. Or as Vaclav Havel explained:

“By breaking the rules of the game [of tyranny], the greengrocer disrupted the game... He exposed it as a mere game... He said that the emperor is naked. And because the emperor is in fact naked, something extremely dangerous happened: by his action, the greengrocer... enabled everyone to peer behind the curtain. He showed everyone that it is possible to live within the truth.”

Václav Havel, The Power of the Powerless

As highly social beings, what we say and do influences the people we encounter, and even minor displays of noncompliance and nonconformity have the power to ripple outward and initiate a butterfly effect that changes society in dramatic ways. Hence why Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn stated that a single individual speaking the truth could bring down a tyranny, or as Henry Melvill observed:

“Our lives are connected by a thousand invisible threads, and along these sympathetic fibers, our actions run as causes and return to us as results.”

Henry Melvill

Some of us, however, face economic, social, or physical repercussions for being too forthright in our beliefs. If the consequences of living fully in the truth are too severe, Rose recommends the strategy of sowing seeds of doubt in the minds of others, or as he explains:

“For example, you can say something like, “I haven’t made up my mind yet” or “On the one hand, I can see the value of x, but on the other...” You can also suggest other options by saying things like “I have a friend who...” or “I read somewhere that...” Doing this gives you plausible deniability while retaining your sense of control. It also offers an escape hatch for others who have been afraid to speak up. Often all it takes is a single spark of ambivalence or mixed opinion. Once you crack open the door, others can gain the courage to follow.”

Todd Rose, Collective Illusions

If, on the other hand, we adopt hypocrisy as a way of life and fully comply with political agendas, ideologies, and mandates which we do not agree with, then we will not only be a victim of the creeping tyranny that is suffocating our society, but also an active supporter. Referring to the government-endorsed lies which the majority of citizens in communist Czechoslovakia complied with, Vaclav Havel wrote:

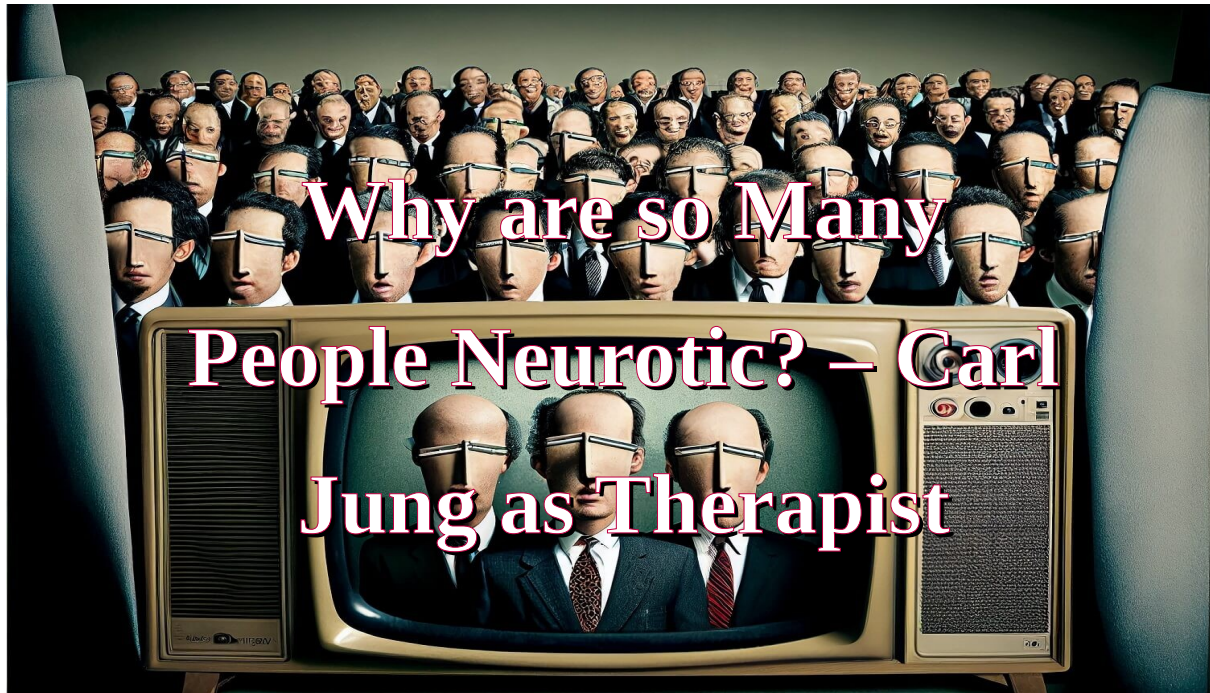
“Individuals need not believe all these mystifications, but they must behave as though they did, or they must at least tolerate them in silence, or get along well with those who work with them. For this reason, however, they must live within a lie. They need not accept the lie. It is enough for them to have accepted their life with it and in it. For by this very fact, individuals confirm the system, fulfil the system, make the system, are the system.”

Václav Havel, The Power of the Powerless



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“There are just as many people who become neurotic because they are merely normal, as there are people who are neurotic because they cannot become normal. That it should enter anyone’s head to educate them to normality is a nightmare for the former, because their deepest need is really to be able to lead “abnormal” lives.”

Carl Jung, Problems of Modern Psychotherapy

With an education system that indoctrinates us to think alike, a mass media that ensures we fear alike, an advertising industry that gets us to like the same things, and a social media that makes it easy to shame and ridicule all those who step too far out of line, many people are conformists. But many in the modern day are also neurotic and so a question arises: Is there a cause-and-effect relationship between too much conformity and neurotic illness? The great Swiss psychiatrist Carl Jung believed there was, and in this video, we are going to explore what a neurosis is and how being too conformist makes us susceptible to this form of illness.

A neurosis is a psychological disorder defined by persistent and deep levels of anxiety and an overall fear of life. In addition to these cardinal symptoms, a neurotic illness may also include depression, guilt, phobias, obsessions and compulsions, excessive worry and rumination, insomnia, irritability, or anger. Carl Jung suggested that the neurotic’s fear of life was a result of “*a disturbed or diminished process of adaptation*” (*Collected Works Volume 18*) and “*a morbid development of the whole of a personality*” (*Collected Works Volume 10*). A neurotic, in other words, is an individual who fails to adapt to the demands of life, whose personality is stunted as a result, and whose existence, therefore, becomes a continual struggle with little, to no reprieve.

While a neurosis isn't necessarily fatal, it slowly but surely saps the vitality out of life. A neurosis destroys our potential, places us in the constricting confines of an ever-shrinking comfort zone, fills us with guilt for a life not lived, wreaks havoc on relationships, inhibits the cultivation of skills, and damages our physical health due to the effects of chronic anxiety and depression on the body. Jung went as far as to call a neurosis "*the agony of a human soul in all its vast complexity*" (Carl Jung, *The State of Psychotherapy Today*).

According to Jung, a neurotic illness is triggered by three conditions: Firstly, an individual is confronted with a challenge, task, or problem in an important domain of life. Secondly, because of cowardice, laziness, self-doubt, or just plain stupidity, the individual evades the challenge rather than facing up to it.

"If we follow the history of a neurosis with attention, we regularly find a critical moment when some problem emerged that was evaded."

Carl Jung, The Eros Theory

The existence of a problem that one wishes to evade is not sufficient to produce a neurosis. Rather a third condition is necessary and that is the use of defense mechanisms to force the problem out of conscious awareness.

". . . it would be a serious misunderstanding to confuse the existence of problems with neurosis. There is a marked difference between the two in that the neurotic is ill because he is unconscious of his problems. . ."

Carl Jung, The Stages of Life

Common defence mechanisms include repressing thoughts, displacing emotions, projecting one's problems onto another person, compulsive activity to keep oneself distracted, self-medicating into a numbed-out state, or avoiding situations that trigger awareness of one's problem. The use of defense mechanisms is paid for at the cost of increased anxiety, for as Jung wrote regarding one of his neurotic patients:

". . .by repressing disagreeable thoughts she created something like a psychic vacuum which, as usually happens, gradually became filled with anxiety. Had she troubled herself consciously with her thoughts she would have known what was lacking, and she would then have needed no anxiety states as a substitute for the absence of conscious suffering."

Carl Jung, The Development of Personality

Evading and denying the tasks of life is very common in the modern day, and this is contributing to epidemic levels of neurotic illness. Jung pointed to several factors that can account for this: Firstly, many parents pass onto their children a neurotic approach on to life. For children emulate the fear of life of the neurotic parent, and from an early age learn to evade life's problems, or as Jung explains:

". . .the psychic disorders of children are more often than not causally connected with the psychology of the parents, and in most cases one would do well to pay more attention to the faulty attitude of parents and educators than to the child's psyche, which in itself would function correctly if it were not disturbed by the harmful influence of the parents."

Carl Jung, Collected Works Volume 18

A second factor responsible for the high rates of neuroses is an unwillingness of many young adults to adequately separate themselves from their parents as they approach adulthood. For to become an adult in-body, but remain a child in-mind, is to ensure one will be afflicted with a neurotic illness, or as Jung explains:

“Though it is a misfortune for a child to have no parents, it is equally dangerous for him to be too closely bound to his family. An excessively strong attachment to the parents is a severe handicap in his later adaptation to the world, for a growing human being is not destined to remain forever the child of his parents.”

Carl Jung, Child Development and Education

Social forces are also promoting the laziness and passivity that leads to the neurotic evasion of life's tasks. For example, there is an excessive use of addictive technologies, paternalistic governments that inhibit the cultivation of self-responsibility, diets that are sub-optimal for energy production, an overuse of psychotropic and recreational drugs, and a moral system that no longer elevates the virtues of courage and self-reliance to their rightful spot in the pantheon of values.

But while many reasons can account for the existence of so many neurotics, the important question for the sufferer is how to effectuate a cure? According to Jung the approach we should take depends on whether the problem we are evading lies in the collective, outer world, of people, places, or things, or in the individualist, inner world of our psyche.

“In my picture of the world there is a vast outer realm and an equally vast inner realm; between these two stands man, facing now one and now the other. . .”

Carl Jung, Freud and Jung: Contrasts

Problems in the outer world tend to take the form of failures to meet the basic demands of social life. For example, some people struggle to make friends or to establish intimate relationships. Others fail to attain gainful employment or to contribute to their community. Still others fail to develop an adequate persona, or social personality. These problems are of a collective nature in the sense that they represent challenges of life that all members of a society must face up to and Jung called cases of neurotic illness caused by evading these tasks instances of “*atrophied collective adaptation*” (*Collected Works Volume 16*). Individuals afflicted with this type of neurosis need to become more “normal” in the sense of cultivating the basic skills needed to function successfully in society.

“Previously, because of his illness, the patient stood partly or wholly outside life. Consequently he neglected many of his duties, either in regard to social achievement or in regard to his purely human tasks. He must get back to fulfilling these duties if he wants to become well again.”

Carl Jung, The Theory of Psychoanalysis

But some people meet all the demands of social life and attain all the trappings of worldly success – a spouse and a family, a satisfying social life, a good career, as well as ample material success – and yet still become neurotic. Or as Jung writes:

“...psychotherapists are familiar with the collectively adapted person who has everything and does everything that could reasonably be required as a guarantee of health, but yet is ill.”

Carl Jung, Principles of Practical Psychotherapy

The problem being evaded by these neurotics is not to be found in the outer world, but in the inner world of the psyche. Such individuals are afraid of their individuality and so fail to heed the call of their conscience to develop the idiosyncratic side of their nature.

“He is incapable of living his own life and finding the character that belongs to him.”

Carl Jung, Symbols of Transformation

These neurotics are too normal, they are too conformist, and their social success acts as a barrier to exploring the depths of the psyche. But as the development of the individual side of our nature is just as imperative as our collective development, a failure to adequately differentiate ourselves from others will make us neurotic, or as Jung writes:

“There are large numbers of people for whom the development of individuality is the prime necessity, especially in a cultural epoch like ours, which is literally flattened out by collective norms . . . In my experience there are. . .very many for whom the development of individuality is an indispensable requirement.”

Carl Jung, On Psychic Energy

To be healed the all-too normal neurotic must experience a symbolic death, or the letting go of much that is familiar and comfortable, so the individualistic side of his nature can emerge, or as Jung puts it:

“That the highest summit of life can be expressed through the symbolism of death is a well-known fact, for any growing beyond oneself means death.”

Carl Jung, Symbols of Transformation

Character traits, relationships, career choices, and especially habits of thought and behaviour, many of these must be sacrificed to permit the birth of the new. Our desire for social validation must be sacrificed as well, and so too the comfort we derive by conforming. For to paraphrase Jung we need to be “*drawn out of ourselves onto other paths*” (V16) that permit the full flowering of our character.

“[The neurotic] must in very truth take the way of the individual life [path] he has recognized as his own, and continue along it until such time as an unmistakable reaction from the unconscious tells him that he is on the wrong track.”

Carl Jung, Collected Works Volume 7

If we have spent years or decades treading the conformist path of normality, establishing a more idiosyncratic approach to life may seem risky. We may face ridicule, disappoint others, or lose some of our social status, but as Jung writes:

“If you want to cure a neurosis you have to risk something. To do something without taking a risk is merely ineffectual . . .”

Carl Jung, Collected Works Volume 11

But remaining neurotic, is also a risk – but a risk that offers no reward. We will waste our life, waste our potential, and be destined to live out our days plagued by anxiety, depression, self-hate, and guilt. And for those afflicted by the neurosis of too much conformity we should keep in mind that some of us are just not fit to be normal by modern day standards, we need an abnormal existence in order to be healthy, or as Jung writes:

“Among neurotics, there are not a few who do not require any reminders of their social duties and obligations, but are born and destined rather to be bearers of new cultural ideals. They are neurotic as long as they bow down before authority and refuse the freedom to which they are destined.”

Carl Jung, Some Crucial Points in Psychoanalysis



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Why do Most Relationships Fail? – The Myth of the Magical Other

“...more people look for salvation through relationship than in houses of worship. One may even suggest that romantic love has replaced institutional religion as the greatest motive power and influence in our lives...the search for love has replaced the search for God.”

[James Hollis, *The Eden Project: In Search of the Magical Other*](#)

Half of all first marriages end in divorce; as do two-thirds of second marriages, and nearly three-quarters of third marriages. Most non-marital relationships also end in separation. Of the relationships that do last, many are unhealthy and unhappy. Most relationships, in other words, fail. In some cases it is infidelity, abuse, or a clash in personality, beliefs, values, or life-plans that causes a relationship to fail. Many times, however, it is the result of one, or both partners, burdening the relationship with the fantasy that it will cure all their personal problems. This belief that a romantic relationship will unlock a life of happiness and fulfillment, the psychiatrist M. Scott Peck called the myth of romantic love. And in this video, we explain how belief in this myth destroys one's capacity to cultivate the healthy and realistic love that sustains fulfilling relationships. For as M. Scott Peck writes:

“The myth of romantic love tells us that when we meet the person for whom we are intended...we will be able to satisfy all of each other's needs forever and ever, and therefore live happily forever after in perfect union and harmony...While I generally find that great myths are great precisely because they represent and embody great universal truths...the myth of romantic love is a dreadful lie...as a psychiatrist I weep in my heart almost daily for the ghastly confusion and suffering that this myth fosters.”

[M. Scott Peck, *The Road Less Traveled*](#)

The myth of romantic love is pervasive in popular culture; countless shows, movies, plays, books, and songs are centered around the theme of a lost and lonely individual who finds the perfect romantic match, and thereafter experiences a life of happiness and fulfillment. The psychologist James Hollis called this perfect romantic match the Magical Other. And he suggested that as traditional sources of meaning such as religion, family, and community have eroded, the pursuit of the Magical Other has intensified – as many people today deify romantic love and view it as the central source of life’s meaning. Or as Hollis wrote in *The Eden Project: The Search for the Magical Other*:

“One of the false ideas that drives humankind is the fantasy of the Magical Other, the notion that there is one person out there who is right for us...a soul-mate who will repair the ravages of our personal history; one who will be there for us, who will read our minds, know what we want and meet those deepest needs; a good parent who will protect us from suffering and, if we are lucky, spare us the perilous journey of individuation... Virtually all popular culture is fueled by...the search for the Magical Other.”

[*James Hollis, The Eden Project: In Search of the Magical Other*](#)

In addition to popular culture promoting the idea that a Magical Other can save one from suffering and make life meaningful, the search for the “Magical Other” often stems from a childhood lacking in sufficient parental love, affection, and attention. A child who does not receive steady and dependable caregiving tends to develop into an adult afflicted with feelings of insecurity, a fragile identity, and pervasive feelings of emptiness. Such an individual often attempts to fill the emotional void by anchoring their sense of self in a relationship, and by seeking a romantic partner who can assume the role of a maternal or paternal figure, or as Hollis writes:

“The search for reflection from the Magical Other is also the dynamic of narcissism, which manifests in the adult who as a child was insufficiently mirrored by a loving, affirmative parent.”

[*James Hollis, The Eden Project: In Search of the Magical Other*](#)

In the early stages of a relationship, it can appear as if one has found their Magical Other. With dopamine and oxytocin flooding the brain, and with evolved mating instincts playing tricks on the mind so as to increase the probability of reproducing, the experience of falling in love is rife with illusions – the primary of which is the idealization of the significant other. The faults and flaws of the partner are ignored or glossed over as eccentricities which only add to their charm. The novelty of the other, coupled with their perceived perfection, engenders deep feelings of infatuation, happiness, and euphoria, which can breed the illusion that life is now complete. Furthermore, one’s ego boundaries collapse as one psychologically merges with the partner, just as in early infancy one was psychologically merged with the mother. “*In some respects the act of falling in love is an act of regression.*”, observed James Hollis. Or as the M. Scott Peck wrote regarding this experience:

“The unreality of these feelings when we have fallen in love is essentially the same as the unreality of the two-year-old who feels itself to be king of the family and the world with power unlimited. Just as reality intrudes upon the two-year-old’s fantasy of omnipotence so does reality intrude upon the fantastic unity of the couple who have fallen in love...One by one, gradually or suddenly, the ego boundaries snap back into place; gradually or suddenly, they fall out of love. Once again they are two separate individuals.”

[M. Scott Peck, *The Road Less Traveled*](#)

When reality intrudes upon the illusions of falling in love, the romantic partner, rather than being a Magical Other, is revealed as being human, all-too-human. Seen without rose colored glasses, their faults, flaws, rough edges, and bad habits grow apparent. The partner does not always make one happy, meet one’s needs, or fulfill one’s expectations; and so, in place of sustained infatuation and happiness, at times there are feelings of indifference, disappointment, and even disdain. These feelings are a normal component of long-term relationships, for as M. Scott Peck writes: “...*real love often occurs in a context in which the feeling of love is lacking, when we act lovingly despite the fact that we don’t feel loving.*” ([M. Scott Peck, *The Road Less Traveled*](#)) However, for individuals enthralled to the myth of romantic love, the conclusion of the honeymoon period, and the awareness of the widening gulf between their fantasy of who they want their partner to be, and who they really are, can be a troubling experience. Or as James Hollis writes:

“Why don’t you make me feel good about myself?” we ask, usually unconsciously but sometimes straight out. “Why don’t you meet my needs?”...What a disappointment, how unromantic – the Other was not put on earth to serve or take care of me, protect me from my life!”

[James Hollis, *The Eden Project: In Search of the Magical Other*](#)

Or as Hollis continues:

“...if I do not see and love my partner as a real person in the real world, if instead I elaborate a fantasy about him or her, using the person merely as a springboard for my imagination and my wishes, then I am doomed sooner or later to resent the actual person for not living up to my fantasies.”

[James Hollis, *The Eden Project: In Search of the Magical Other*](#)

So long as one remains captured by the myth of romantic love, and chained to search for the Magical Other, one dooms their relationships from the start. Holding onto the expectation that a romantic partner should be the primary source of life’s meaning leads to resentment and mounting pressures that either strain or break the relationship. A pathological dynamic can also develop. The individual in search of the Magical Other manipulates and controls their partner in the attempt to mold them into their idealized image; while the other partner, fearful that they will be abandoned, hopelessly strives to live up to this fantasy by submissively devoting almost all their time and energy to satiating the other’s every desire, wish, and need. Or as Hollis writes:

“[The search for the Magical Other] accounts for the fact that so many couples move from naive relatedness to the joustings of power. If you do not act as I wish, I shall bring about your compliance by my actions. I will control you, criticize you, abuse you, withdraw from you, sabotage you...And so, through tactics of dependence or anger or control, mixed with emotional and sexual withdrawal, one [of the partners] tries to force the Other back into one’s original, imaginary mold. Seldom are these attitudes and behaviors conscious.”

[*James Hollis, The Eden Project: In Search of the Magical Other*](#)

To avoid the unnecessary suffering that plagues so many relationships, it is critical that we discard the myth of romantic love, abandon the search for the Magical Other, and rather than seeking salvation in someone else’s affection, concentrate on cultivating self-love. For as the psychologist Nathaniel Branden wrote:

“The first love affair we must consummate successfully is the love affair with ourselves. Only then are we ready for other love relationships.”

[*Nathaniel Branden, The Psychology of Romantic Love*](#)

Or as M. Scott Peck observed:

“If being loved is your goal, you will fail to achieve it. The only way to be assured of being loved is to be a person worthy of love, and you cannot be a person worthy of love when your primary goal in life is to passively be loved.”

[*M. Scott Peck, The Road Less Traveled*](#)

One of the most effective ways to find the motivation to cultivate self-love is to recognize and accept the fact that we are, and always will be, inescapably alone. We are born alone, die alone, and though the boundaries which separate us from others can be bridged, they can never be transcended. “*We are each of us, in the last analysis, islands of consciousness—and that is the root of our aloneness.*”, observed James Hollis. Relationships come, and either through breakup, divorce, or death, they end, but what always remains is our individual journey – the magnum opus of our life.

“The ultimate goal of life remains the spiritual growth of the individual, the solitary journey to peaks that can be climbed only alone.”

[*M. Scott Peck, The Road Less Traveled*](#)

Focusing on expanding our skills, pursuing excellence in a vocation, cultivating enriching hobbies, sculpting our mind and body, creating a network of inspiring friends, seeking adventures, and devoting ourselves to rewarding goals – this is how we make our solitary journey meaningful, and therein cultivate self-love. And with sufficient self-love, we do not need a relationship to thrive, and, paradoxically, this is when we are at our most attractive and capable of cultivating a healthy relationship that is based on the following foundation of realism: A romantic partner can support us and enrich our journey, just as we can support and enrich theirs. However, to use a relationship to flee the burdens of our existence and to look to another person to provide us fulfillment, is to damage the relationship and cripple ourselves with infantile dependencies. The earthly salvation

that we seek can only be found by cultivating and affirming our individual journey; it cannot be found in the arms of another.

“Those vested deeply in the idea of romance will no doubt protest, but then they will remain enslaved to the pursuit of the illusory Magical Other.”

James Hollis, The Eden Project: In Search of the Magical Other

Or as M. Scott Peck concludes:

“...it is the separateness of the partners that enriches the union. Great marriages cannot be constructed by individuals who are terrified by their basic aloneness, as so commonly is the case, and seek a merging in marriage... Two people love each other only when they are quite capable of living without each other but choose to live with each other... Genuine love not only respects the individuality of the other but actually seeks to cultivate it, even at the risk of separation or loss.

M. Scott Peck, The Road Less Traveled



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“. . .you must look at who you are and make an effort to know yourself, which is the most difficult knowledge one can imagine. When you know yourself, you will not puff yourself up like the frog who wanted to be the equal of the ox. . .”

Don Quixote, Miguel de Cervantes

From an early age most of us are taught the value of honesty and we are swift to cast scorn on the liars who walk among us. Yet, in a striking paradox, many who claim to be honest in their interactions with others fall prey to the most insidious form of dishonesty: that of lying to one's self. In this video we explore the phenomenon of self-deception and examine how it paves the way for broken relationships and a ruined life.

“Nothing is so difficult as not deceiving oneself.”

Ludwig Wittgenstein, Culture and Value

Deception is a two-faced phenomenon. On the one hand there is explicit lying, where we tell a lie to another person, but know that we are lying. On the other hand, there is self-deception, where we tell a lie, either to ourselves or to another, but we believe the lie we tell. It is easy to understand why people tell explicit lies – for even if immoral, an explicit lie can help us to evade responsibility, avoid difficult confrontations, or gain the favor of another. But why do we lie to ourselves?

We lie to ourselves because it is one of the most effective defensive mechanisms against painful thoughts, emotions, and beliefs. Whether mental pain is triggered by a sense of personal inadequacy, feelings of inferiority, self-loathing, guilt, or shame, self-deception helps us escape these feelings. Self-deception also reduces the mental discomfort that accompanies cognitive dissonance, or as Carol Tavris and Elliot Aronson write in *Mistakes Were Made (but Not By Me)*:

“The engine that drives [self-deception], the energy that produces the need to justify our actions and decisions—especially the wrong ones—is the unpleasant feeling . . . called “cognitive dissonance.” Cognitive dissonance is a state of tension that occurs when a person holds two cognitions (ideas, attitudes, beliefs, or opinions) that are psychologically inconsistent with each other, such as “Smoking is a dumb thing to do because it could kill me” and “I smoke two packs a day.” Dissonance produces mental discomfort that ranges from minor pangs to deep anguish; people don’t rest easy until they find a way to reduce it.”

Carol Tavris and Elliot Aronson, Mistakes Were Made (but Not By Me)

Cognitive dissonance is pervasive in the human experience. For example, it arises if we have harmed another, but believe ourselves to be good. It will be triggered if we are stuck in a dead-end job, yet believe we are smart and capable. Or it may emerge if we think we are a person of value, but are in a relationship with an abusive or disloyal partner. To reduce the cognitive dissonance triggered by situations like these, we can take healthy actions that address the root cause of our mental anguish. We can apologize for a wrong done to another, we can cultivate skills that make a new career possible, or we can end a toxic relationship. But taking these constructive steps often requires courage, discipline, and hard work and so the easy way out of resolving our dissonance with self-deception can prove tempting. We can tell ourselves that the other person deserved the wrong we did to them, that our dead-end job provides us with security, or that our relationship isn’t toxic as we deserve our partner’s anger. These self-deceptions allow us to escape the anguish of cognitive dissonance without making any real changes to our life.

Everyone takes the easy way out at times, but if self-deception becomes chronic and the primary way we deal with mental pain, we begin down a path that can easily ruin our life. For each lie we tell ourselves to escape awareness of the existence of a problem, is a step taken away from the path of self-development. Each time we deceive ourselves to diminish the uncomfortable feelings of cognitive dissonance, our problems and difficulties go unresolved, and we set ourselves up for greater suffering down the line. Or as Travis and Aronson explain:

“. . .mindless [self-deception], like quicksand, can draw us deeper into disaster. It blocks our ability to even see our errors, let alone correct them. It distorts reality, keeping us from getting all the information we need and assessing issues clearly. It prolongs and widens rifts between lovers, friends, and nations. It keeps us from letting go of unhealthy habits.”

Carol Tavris and Elliot Aronson, Mistakes Were Made (but Not By Me)

The more the quicksand of self-deception pulls us down, the more we limit our potential. But self-deception, is more than just self-limiting. It also impedes the cultivation, and maintenance, of healthy relationships and in extreme cases can motivate us to commit acts of cruelty toward innocent victims. To understand how self-deception harms interpersonal relationships, we need to recognize that one of the most common ways that we deceive ourselves is through the manipulation of our memories. We can be selective as to what we remember and denying that something has happened is one of the most effective means to reduce cognitive dissonance. For example, if we have wronged someone and feel guilty about it, instead of apologizing and making amends, we can deny that the event ever happened, or as Nietzsche put:

“I have done it, says my memory. I cannot have done it, says my pride and remains inexorable. Finally, the memory gives way.”

Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil

Manipulating our memories to deceive ourselves goes further than mere denial of a memory, many people will go as far as to create false memories to diminish mental pain and to resolve cognitive dissonance. For example, if cognitive dissonance is triggered by the contradictory beliefs that (a) we are a smart and capable person and (b) our life is a mess, we have a few options to quell the mental anguish of our cognitive dissonance. We can take steps to straighten out our life, or we can blame our current situation on events of the past and even if our past wasn't bad enough to excuse our current problems, we can deceive ourselves with false memories to convince ourselves it was. With false memories we can turn our past into a horror show of abuse, trauma, and cruel twists of fate, that makes our current life situation not a disappointment, but an accomplishment, given what we tell ourselves we went through. Or as Travis and Aronson explain in *Mistakes Were Made (but Not By Me)*:

“Why would people claim to remember that they had suffered harrowing experiences if they hadn't, especially when that belief causes rifts with families or friends? By distorting their memories, these people can get what they want by revising what they had, and what they want is to turn their present bleak or merely mundane lives into dazzling victories over adversity. Memories of abuse also help them resolve the dissonance between “I am a smart, capable person” and “My life sure is a mess right now” with an explanation that makes them feel better about themselves and removes responsibility. . .”

Carol Tavris and Elliot Aronson, Mistakes Were Made (but Not By Me)

Another way self-deception harms relationships was identified by Fyodor Dostoevsky. In his book *Demons*, one of the characters, Fedka the Convict, observes how the protagonist, Pyotr Stepanovich, “invents a man and then lives with him”. What he meant by this was that instead of looking at someone in a clear and objective manner, and evaluating their character based on their behaviors and actions, sometimes we create, or invent, a fictitious characterization of another to justify how we treat them. In Dostoevsky's book *The Brothers Karamazov*, he gives an example of this form of self-justification in action. When one of the characters is asked why he hates someone so much and he answers:

“I'll tell you. He has done me no harm. But I played him a dirty trick, and ever since I have hated him.”

Fyodor Dostoevsky, The Brothers Karamazov

Creating a fictitious characterization of another person to justify mistreating them, sets us down a dangerous path. In *Mistakes Were Made (But Not By Me)*, Tavris and Aronson provide an example of how this process can unfold:

“Take a boy who goes along with a group of his fellow seventh graders who are taunting and bullying a weaker kid who did them no harm. The boy likes being part of the gang but his heart really isn’t in the bullying. Later, he feels some dissonance about what he did. “How can a decent kid like me,” he wonders, “have done such a cruel thing to a nice, innocent little kid like him?” To reduce dissonance, he will try to convince himself that the victim is neither nice nor innocent: “He is such a nerd and a crybaby. Besides, he would have done the same to me if he had the chance.” Once the boy starts down the path of blaming the victim, he becomes more likely to beat up on the victim with even greater ferocity the next chance he gets.”

Carol Tavris and Elliot Aronson, Mistakes Were Made (but Not By Me)

This dynamic of a nice kid becoming a bully by convincing himself that the victim deserved it, is the same dynamic that occurs at a collective level when normal people scapegoat an ethnic, religious, or political minority. The scapegoating process typically begins with minor transgressions being committed against the scapegoated group. Perhaps the group is banned from certain places or stripped of certain rights. An act of justification usually follows these initial transgressions, whereby the scapegoated group is demonized in the minds of the aggressors with words and accusations. For example, the scapegoats may be labelled as degenerate, disease ridden, or a threat to society, or they will be accused of fictitious crimes. This demonization process paves the way for even worse acts of aggression to follow and if this process, which the psychologist Ervin Staub called a “continuum of destruction”, is not halted, the end result can be horrifying, as evidenced in the totalitarian states of the 20th century.

“One psychological consequence of harm-doing is further devaluation of victims... people tend to assume that victims have earned their suffering by their actions or character.”

Ervin Staub, The Psychology of Good and Evil

Given that self-deception limits our potential, ruins relationships, and can turn us into a man or woman capable of inflicting serious harm on innocent victims, if we wish to live a fulfilling life and to contribute to the uplifting of others, not to tearing them down, we should limit the degree to which we lie to ourselves.

Sometimes, escape from the quicksand of self-deception occurs when we hit rock bottom, and our illusions are shattered against our will. But this is a dangerous means of escape as the attempt to rebuild a broken life is an arduous task. It is far better to voluntarily break our illusions through a ruthless attempt at self-honesty. For as Carl Jung noted:

“A visible enemy is always better than an invisible one. In this case I can see no advantage whatever in behaving like an ostrich. It is certainly no ideal for people...to live in a perpetual state of delusion about themselves, foisting everything they dislike onto their neighbours and plaguing them with their prejudices and projections.”

Carl Jung, The Practice of Psychotherapy

When we break the habit of self-deception, life unfolds with a newfound ease as we are no longer burdened by the convoluted web of falsehoods we once spun. Freed from the exhausting need to layer deceit upon deceit we can devote more energy toward accomplishing meaningful goals. When

we stop lying to ourselves about how we treat others, we cease sabotaging our relationships, and we avoid the perilous path of scapegoating. Ultimately, abandoning self-deceit is an act of self-emancipation as greater honesty frees us to heed the age-old wisdom to know thyself.

“To this day I have deceived others and myself; I have suffered for it, and my suffering was cheap and vulgar. . .I’m glad that I see my faults clearly, that I am conscious of them. This will help me to reform and become a different man.”

Anton Chekov, The Duel



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“I must be myself, I cannot break myself any longer for you. . .If you can love me for what I am, we shall be the happier. If you cannot, I will still seek to deserve that you should.”

Ralph Waldo Emerson, Self-Reliance

The great 19th century American philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson believed that to flourish we must be a non-conformist. If we just think as others think and do as others do, we limit our potential and place our health or sickness at the mercy of social forces beyond our control. In this video we are going to explore the dangers of conformity, what non-conformity meant for Emerson, and how the non-conformist acts as a force of good in a society gone mad.

“Whoso would be a man must be a nonconformist.”

Ralph Waldo Emerson, Self-Reliance

To be a conformist is to orient our life around the dominant norms, values, and ideals of our society. It is to allow the boundaries and templates of our culture to shape our sense of self. Most of us become conformists without reflecting on what we are doing – we see everyone around us conforming and so it feels natural to do the same. But conformity comes at a price, or as Emerson stated in a lecture given in 1844:

“I pay a destructive tax in my conformity.”

Ralph Waldo Emerson, Lecture Read Before the Society in Amory Hall, March 1844

In any society only certain character traits are favoured by the trends of conformity, while many others – which may be healthy in their own right – are looked upon with indifference or disdain. In our day, for example, extroversion is favoured over introversion, obedience over disobedience, and risk-aversion over risk-taking. Some people may find their inner nature fits the mold of conformity,

but many will find the opposite. For those of us in the latter group, conformity is akin to wearing a mask made to fit the mold of another's face. The mask of conformity never feels comfortable and at times it may cause us to feel like a fraud or imposter.

Conformity also leads to waste – wasted time, wasted opportunities, and wasted resources. In the need to satisfy others and maintain appearances, we do things we do not value, say things we do not believe, and obtain things we do not need, or as Emerson writes:

“Custom . . . gives me no power therefrom, and runs me in debt to boot. We spend our incomes . . . for a hundred trifles, I know not what, and not for the things of a man. Our expense is almost all for conformity.”

Ralph Waldo Emerson, Man the Reformer

But the dangers of conformity reach pathological levels when, as in our day, a society becomes infected with lies. Politicians lie almost as frequently as they open their mouths. A degenerate education system teaches lies on topics ranging from science, to history, ethics, economics, and politics. The media lies about world events. While corporations lie to us about the value, or safety, of their products. With no shortage of lies percolating throughout society, the modern path of conformity leads in errant ways. It encourages us to go into debt to buy things we don't need, to consume unhealthy foods, to be obedient to those in power, to take pharmaceutical drugs that do more harm than good, to eschew our passion in favour of money or social status, and if we ever feel anxious or depressed, the conformist way is to distract ourselves with screens, or to numb ourselves with psychotropic drugs.

“All goes well as long as you run with conformists. But you, who are an honest man in other particulars, know that there is alive somewhere a man whose honesty reaches to this point also, that he shall not kneel to false gods, and, on the day when you meet him, you sink into the class of counterfeits. . . If you take in a lie, you must take in all that belongs to it.”

Ralph Waldo Emerson, Religion

To be a non-conformist, in the modern world, is to renounce the lies that shape our society and to renounce the self that has been shaped by these lies. This act of renunciation paves the way for self-transformation, or as Emerson writes: “*The man who renounces himself, comes to himself.*” (*Ralph Waldo Emerson, Lecture to Divinity Students*). When we abandon the habits of conformity and stop pursuing its ideals, we clear the way for the emergence of a more authentic state of being. We take off the false mask of conformity and permit our individual personality to shine through. But our renunciation should not be limited to self-renunciation, we should also renounce affiliation with organizations and institutions that are infiltrated by the lies of our society. For a non-conformist, according to Emerson, must stand under his or her own banner, not the banner of another:

“It is only as a man puts off all foreign support, and stands alone, that I see him to be strong and to prevail. He is weaker by every recruit to his banner.”

Ralph Waldo Emerson, Self-Reliance

Along with the act of renunciation, the non-conformist must establish a new direction in life as merely rejecting conformist ways, without replacing them with something new, will leave us in a pit of aimless and meaningless despair. We need new pursuits to keep us occupied, new habits to keep our life structured, and new goals to give us direction. In the process of re-orienting our life, we should work with what nature has granted us, as it is by cultivating our strengths and talents and aligning our life around pursuits we enjoy, that we unleash our power and pave the way for a great life, or as Emerson writes:

“There is a time in every man’s education when he arrives at the conviction . . . that though the wide universe is full of good, no kernel of nourishing corn can come to him but through his toil bestowed on that plot of ground which is given to him to till. The power which resides in him is new in nature, and none but he knows what that is which he can do, nor does he know until he has tried.”

Ralph Waldo Emerson, Self-Reliance

If conformity has led us astray and we don’t know where truth lies or what the plot of ground we are meant to till consists of, spending time in solitude can help correct for this confusion. Away from the chatter and distraction of other minds, solitude can help us understand who we are and what we want from life. There are voices, wrote Emerson “*which we hear in solitude, [that] grow faint and inaudible as we enter into the world.*” (Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Self-Reliance*). Emerson, however, while valuing solitude, did not believe the non-conformist should be a recluse. To flourish as a non-conformist is to strike the optimal balance between solitude and society. We must learn to live in harmony with others without an excessive need to gain their approval or to mimic their errant ways. Or as Emerson put it:

“Solitude is impracticable, and society fatal. We must keep our head in the one and our hands in the other. The conditions are met, if we keep our independence, yet do not lose our sympathy.”

Ralph Waldo Emerson, Society and Solitude

Many people recognize the sickness of modern society, but few choose a path of non-conformity as the means of escape. One reason for this is fear, and specifically a fear of ridicule and rejection. The non-conformist must overcome this fear, or at least learn that constructive, non-conformist action can be taken even when consumed by fear:

“What I must do is all that concerns me, not what the people think. This rule. . . may serve for the whole distinction between greatness and meanness. . . It is easy in the world to live after the world’s opinion; it is easy in solitude to live after our own; but the great man is he who in the midst of the crowd keeps with perfect sweetness the independence of solitude.”

Ralph Waldo Emerson, Self-Reliance

In learning to deal with ridicule and rejection it can be helpful to recognize a constructive value to this experience. Not only does it provide us with an opportunity to cultivate the courage of acting in the face of our fears, but furthermore, those who treat us with contempt sometimes reveal truths of our character that those who care for us are too timid to point out. But even if the ridicule is not

constructive, even if it is based on envy or lies, we can use the disapproval of others as motivating fuel that impels us to greater heights, and as Emerson writes:

“Dear to us are those who love us; the swift moments we spend with them are a compensation for a great deal of misery; they enlarge our life; but dearer are those who reject us as unworthy, for they add another life: they build a heaven before us whereof we had not dreamed, and thereby supply to us new powers out of the recesses of the spirit, and urge us to new and unattempted performances.”

Ralph Waldo Emerson, New England Reformers

If we learn to conquer the fear of ridicule and rejection, we will possess a crucial skill in the art of non-conformity. But there is another barrier that prevents many from going the way of a non-conformist and this is laziness. To cultivate our own path through life requires hard work, discipline, and a ruthless persistence of action. For Emerson's non-conformist is not passive, he is an active agent striving to change the world. Once the non-conformist selects a valuable goal, he sticks to it and is not driven off course merely because a bunch conformists disapprove of his ways, or as Emerson writes:

“All men have wandering impulses, fits and starts of generosity. But when you have chosen your part, abide by it, and do not weakly try to reconcile yourself with the world.”

Ralph Waldo Emerson, Heroism

Or as he writes elsewhere:

“If you would serve your brother, because it is fit for you to serve him, do not take back your words when you find that prudent people do not commend you. Adhere to your own act, and congratulate yourself if you have done something strange and extravagant and broken the monotony of a decorous age. It was a high counsel that I once heard given to a young person – “Always do what you are afraid to do.”

Ralph Waldo Emerson, Heroism

Following a non-conformist path will make us healthier, happier, and more powerful, but it will also turn us into a force of good in the world. For the inner state of our being manifests the events of the outer world, or as Emerson put it: “*A man will see his character emitted in the events that seem to meet [him], but which exude from and accompany him.*” (*Ralph Waldo Emerson, The Conduct of Life*) Conformists, in living by lies, are manifesting a sick society. The non-conformist, in aligning himself with the truth of his inner nature and the truth of the world, will manifest events that act as the antidote to a world gone mad.

“In the thought of tomorrow there is a power to upheave . . . all the creeds. . . of the nations, and marshal thee to a heaven which no epic dream has yet depicted. Every man is not so much a workman in the world, as he is a suggestion of that he should be. Men walk as prophecies of the next age.”

Ralph Waldo Emerson, Circles



“The discipline of suffering, of great suffering – do you not know that only this discipline has created all enhancements of man so far?”

Friedrich Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil

Suffering is inevitable. It is an essential component of the human condition, and the sources of suffering are many. Some have gone as far as to suggest that it is suffering, and not its opposites of joy and happiness, that is the more common experience.

“Men are wretched by necessity, and determined to believe themselves wretched by accident.”

Giacomo Leopardi, Thoughts

So given that we will suffer, the important question is: ‘How will we suffer?’ Will we let our suffering destroy us and drive us into a pit of despair, or will our suffering lift us to the heights of a fulfilling life? In this video, we examine the value that lies latent in the experience of suffering and make the argument that most people approach suffering in a way that is antithetical to life.

“All good in a man for which he is praised or loved,” wrote Hermann Hesse “is merely good suffering, the right kind, the living kind of suffering, a suffering to the full. . .From suffering springs strength, from suffering springs health.”

Hermann Hesse, Zarathustra’s Return

At first glance suffering appears to be one of life's evils. It tends to arise with the misfortunes of illness, injury, failure, loss, or rejection. It is a painful experience consisting of an onslaught of negative emotions and it tends to isolate us from friends and family. What value can there be to an experience which is associated with all these negatives? What is it about suffering that could lead Nietzsche to write that "...it almost determines the order of rank how profoundly human beings can suffer...Profound suffering makes noble; it separates." (Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*)

In Iain McGilchrist's magnum opus *The Matter with Things* he elucidates on the value of suffering by drawing an analogy between humans and the trees. In the late 1980s scientists involved with the Biosphere 2 project created an enclosed ecological system to explore the potential viability of supporting life on another planet, and as McGilchrist writes:

"Scientists involved in the Biosphere 2 project. . .were puzzled by the fact that trees within the project repeatedly failed to achieve maturity before they fell over. Later, they realised that trees needed wind in order to grow strong. Exposure to winds causes the growth of 'stress wood', which is the core of the tree's strength and integrity. Winds also cause the root system to strengthen."

Iain McGilchrist, The Matter with Things

As with a tree, if a man or woman is placed in a sheltered environment and protected from the stressors of life, he or she will grow up vulnerable and frail. Hardship, adversity, and the suffering that accompanies such experiences, are necessary for a healthy development. Nietzsche recognized this fact about trees and people long before the Biosphere 2 project, and as he wrote:

"Examine the lives of the best and most fruitful people. . .and ask yourself whether a tree that is supposed to grow to a proud height can dispense with bad weather and storms; whether misfortune and eternal resistance...do not belong among the favorable conditions without which any great growth even of virtue is scarcely possible."

Friedrich Nietzsche, The Gay Science

But the value of suffering goes beyond the fact that it is an inescapable by-product of the hardships that lead to personal growth. Rather there are values to suffering that are intrinsic to the experience. Firstly, suffering is a great teacher, or as Nietzsche put it: "*Great suffering is the ultimate liberator of the mind. . .*" Suffering can make evident errors in our ways and point to the necessity for change. Suffering is also essential for empathy – unless we suffer how can we know what others are going through in times of hardship? It is also well established that certain forms of suffering, most notably depression, increase our capacity to realistically evaluate life, or as McGilchrist explains:

". . .depression has repeatedly been shown to be associated with greater realism – provided the depression is not too severe. . . The evidence is that this is not because insight makes you depressed, but because, up to a point, being depressed gives you insight. In understanding one's role in bringing about a certain outcome, depressives are more 'in touch' with reality even than normal subjects. . ."

Iain McGilchrist, The Matter with Things

Suffering, however, does more than teach, it also increases our capacity to enjoy life. For suffering exists at one end of a dipole, or set of opposites, and on the other end lie happiness and joy. As with all pairs of opposites for one to exist, so must the other – for an individual to know joy, he or she must also know the pain of suffering and the greater our capacity for one of these types of experiences, the greater our capacity for the other. Or as Nietzsche put it:

“How little you know of human happiness, you comfortable and benevolent people, for happiness and unhappiness are sisters and evil twins that either grow up together or, as in your case, remain small together.”

Friedrich Nietzsche, The Gay Science

And as McGilchrist explains:

“Opposites are not to be resolved by eliminating the one we happen to dislike, any more than lopping off the south end of a bar magnet gets rid of the south pole: it just shortens the magnet.”

Iain McGilchrist, The Matter with Things

But if many of the hardships and adversities that cause suffering promote self-development, if suffering leads to greater realism and self-knowledge, and if it is needed to fully experience joy and happiness, then why are so many people made worse off by their suffering? Why, in other words, does suffering drive so many of us into states of chronic depression, resentment, pessimism, nihilism and despair?

Simply put, we have become too spoiled by the fruits of modern civilization and as a result most people are not practiced in the art of suffering. With easy access to the necessities of survival, surrounded by sources of pleasure and comfort, and with sickness and death hidden away in hospitals and morgues – we are shielded from the physical and psychic suffering that was the norm of ages past. Our minds and bodies have grown soft and unprepared to deal with the sufferings of life:

“...the refinement and alleviation of existence make even the inevitable mosquito bites of the soul and body seem much too bloody and malignant.”

Nietzsche, The Gay Science

The comforts of modern civilization have magnified our sensitivity to pain and suffering to the point where many consider the mere “*thought of pain*” a “*reproach against the whole of existence.*” (Nietzsche) Or as Nietzsche continued:

“...pain...did not hurt as much then as it does now...pain is now hated much more than was the case for earlier humans, one speaks much worse of it.”

Nietzsche, On the Genealogy of Morality

As a result of our pathological oversensitivity, when suffering does arise, many of us flee from it. We turn to drugs, alcohol, or the alluring glow of screens to distract ourselves. Should these techniques fail, psychotropic drugs can always numb us to our pains. But in always trying to escape, deny, or mask our suffering, we fail to harvest its value. For suffering's value comes only to those who are willing to endure it and to prepared face it head on. And as Nietzsche wrote:

“If you are unwilling to endure your own suffering even for an hour, and continually forestall all possible misfortune, if you regard suffering and pain generally as evil, as detestable, as deserving of annihilation, and as blots on existence, well, you have then... in your heart...the religion of smug ease.”

Nietzsche, The Gay Science

But with that said suffering is not a state we want to wallow in unnecessarily. Chronic suffering is pathological and will wreak havoc on our body and mind. Instead of remaining mired in our suffering, once we have learnt from it, suffering's proper role, as one end of a dipole, is to create a tension that impels us forward into development and growth:

“It is the tension between the warring ends of the bow that gives the arrow the power to fly, as it is the tension in the strings of the lyre that gives rise to melody: this is what [is] meant by [the] saying ‘war is the father of all things’.”

Iain McGilchrist, The Matter with Things

Some may wonder whether what has been discussed so far applies to great suffering: To the suffering that arises from a tragic bereavement, a chronic illness, facing up to death, flirting with madness or being cast into personal ruin. Nietzsche, is one who experienced suffering of this magnitude and he affirmed that it too, has great value.

“At every age of my life, suffering, monstrous suffering, was my lot.”

Friedrich Nietzsche, Quoted in Struggle with the Daemon

Nietzsche suffered from personal rejection, he suffered from a lack of professional recognition, and most of all Nietzsche suffered from chronic ailments for which he could find no cure. As he wrote in a personal correspondence:

“Every two or three weeks I spend about thirty-six hours in bed, in real torment...this winter is the worst there has been...It is such a strain getting through the day that, by evening, there is no pleasure left in life and I really am surprised how difficult living is. It does not seem to be worth it, all this torment...”

Friedrich Nietzsche, The Selected Letters of Friedrich Nietzsche

But the same man who wrote these words also claimed that it was his suffering that propelled him to great heights. His suffering helped him attain greatness as a philosopher and his suffering allowed him to reach, in his words, “*heights of the soul from which even tragedy [ceased] to look tragic.*” If, therefore, we are beset by great suffering, we can turn to people like Nietzsche for inspiration. For Nietzsche was a living testament to the fact that with courage and the right mindset it is possible to endure the worst of life's hells, and to emerge with more depth of character, greater wisdom, and an enhanced capacity for joy:

“...to speak mystically, the path to one’s own heaven always leads through the voluptuousness of one’s own hell.”

Friedrich Nietzsche, The Gay Science

Or as he wrote elsewhere in the same book:

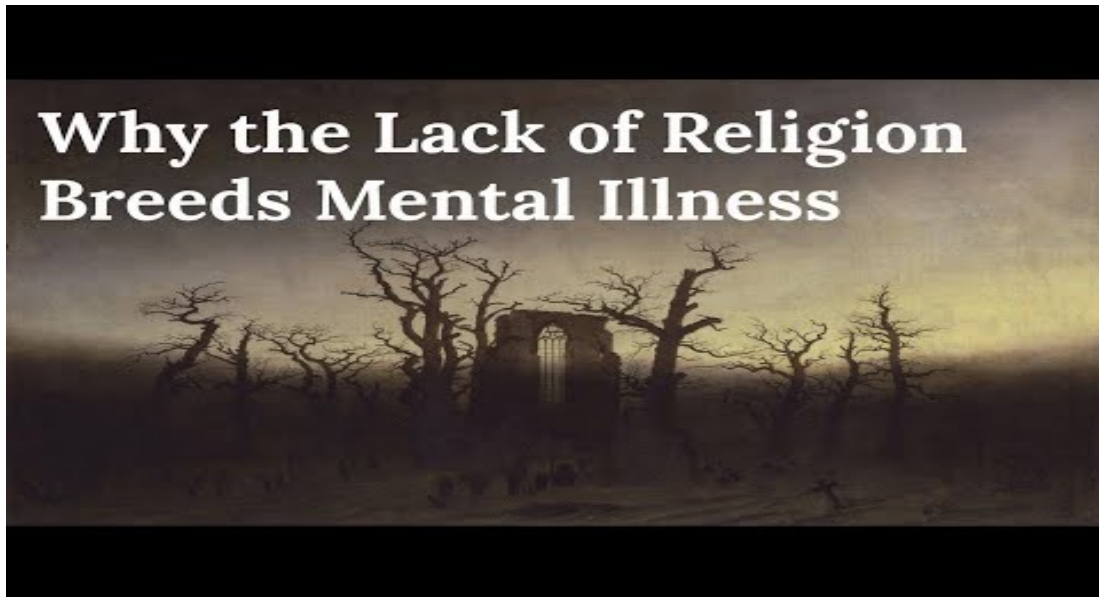
“...from such abysses [of suffering] one returns newborn, having shed one’s skin... with a more delicate taste for joy, with a tenderer tongue for all good things, with merrier senses...more childlike and yet a hundred times subtler than one has ever been before.

Friedrich Nietzsche, The Gay Science



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“The least of things with a meaning is worth more in life than the greatest of things without it.”

Carl Jung, Practice of Psychotherapy

We live in a world consumed by an endless series of crises. But of all the crises we face the one that may be of the greatest concern, is one that receives relatively little attention, and this is the crisis of meaning. In his essay *The Aims of Psychotherapy* Carl Jung called this “*the general neurosis of our times*”, and as he explains further:

“...the lack of meaning in life is a soul-sickness whose full extent and import our age has not yet begun to comprehend.”

Carl Jung, The Structure and Dynamics of the Psyche

This crisis reaches back several generations. In the late 19th century, the philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche observed that nihilism, or what he termed the “*radical repudiation of meaning*” (The Will to Power) was on the rise in the West. Was this the result of the fall of the Christian worldview and the rise of a scientific, reductionist and mechanistic worldview? Was the “death of god” the most momentous event of the modern era?

“[Nietzsche] felt the agony, the suffering, and the misery of a godless world so intensely, at a time when others were yet blind to its tremendous consequence, that he was able to experience in advance, as it were, the fate of a coming generation.”

Walter Kaufmann, Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist

We are now experiencing the fate that Nietzsche prophesized, a fate where, in the words of Viktor Frankl, “*Ever more people . . . have the means to live, but no meaning to live for.*” (Viktor Frankl) A

fate which is manifesting in a “*hatred of the existing society, the apocalyptic “sense of an ending” [and the] need for some kind of worthy cause to give meaning to one’s life.*” (Redemption by War, Ronald Stromberg)

In this video we are going to explore what meaning in life is and why it is so important. We will then examine why the decline in religion may be the prime cause of this modern crisis of meaning and a prime factor in the widespread occurrence of anxiety disorders, neuroses, and depression.

“. . .happiness is about the present moment, independent of other moments, whereas meaning links events across time, thus integrating past, present, and future.”

[Iain McGilchrist, *The Matter with Things*](#)

Meaning in a human life is grounded in narrative. A life narrative is the story we tell ourselves about ourselves, and this story acts as a sort of cognitive organizing process that helps us make sense of who we are and where we are going. Our narrative gives rise to and sustains our sense of self and just like a novel or movie, it is defined by a particular plot or theme. This theme can be coherent and life-affirming or it can be disjointed, disempowering, incoherent and so lacking in meaning. The less meaning our life has, the more we will suffer, and this is exemplified by the experience of many schizophrenics who struggle to view life through the coherence of a narrative. In *Madness and Modernism* Louis Sass quotes a schizophrenic patient who said:

“I feel as if I’ve lost the continuity linking the events in my past. Instead of a series of events linked by continuity, my past just seems like disconnected fragments”

[Louis Sass, *Madness and Modernism*](#)

And as McGilchrist explains concerning this disturbing lack of a coherent life narrative:

“If your world disintegrates [through a lack of narrative], you stop seeing anything in context, and it becomes puzzling, even frightening. Its sheer facticity then stands out, since it can no longer take its place in any world schema of other things and people that would give it meaning.”

[Iain McGilchrist, *The Matter with Things*](#)

While most people do not suffer the disintegrating effect of no life narrative, what many lack is a satisfying narrative that is rich in meaning. A narrative, in other words, that creates fulfillment, and enables one to cope with the existential conditions of life. The great prevalence of anxiety disorders, depression, addictions, and psychotropic and illicit drug use is evidence which points to this dire lack of meaning, and as Jung notes:

“Meaninglessness inhibits fullness of life and is therefore equivalent to illness.”

[Carl Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*](#)

To make matters worse while many people feel that their life is missing something, most do not realize that what is missing is meaning. Instead, to fill this void of meaningless, many people chase after more money and material goods, elevated social status, increased knowledge, or most of all more moments of pleasure and happiness. But none of these things are adequate replacements, for as McGilchrist explains:

“People who report being happy but have little or no sense of meaning in their lives have the same gene expression patterns as people who are enduring chronic adversity, such as loneliness, bereavement, or poverty.”

Iain McGilchrist, The Matter with Things

Given the importance of meaning, how can a life lacking it, be infused with it? How, in other words, can we discover a more meaningful life narrative? While there are many practical steps to move us in this direction, from finding a life purpose, to cultivating interpersonal relationships, to confronting life’s challenges, one of the most effective is to tap into the wisdom embedded in the mythos of the great religions.

“What is the use of a religion without a mythos, since religion means, if anything at all, precisely that function which links us back to the eternal myth?”

Carl Jung, Answer to Job

Mythos, or what is more commonly called myth or mythology, contains truths about the human predicament and the nature of the psyche that are expressed in narrative form. These narratives can be used to augment our own personal narrative with rich threads of meaning as they provide insights for how to cope with elements of the human condition, be it freedom, loss, loneliness, sickness, old age, suffering or death.

In the modern day many of us have relegated myth to the realm of fiction, believing that only reason, logic and science, or what is called the domain of logos, can reveal to us the truths of the world. But as Jung writes:

“...myth is not fiction: it consists of facts that are continually repeated and can be observed over and over again.”

Carl Jung, Answer to Job

Both logos and mythos are realms for discovering truth. But the truths they reveal are of a different nature. Science teaches us the neurological correlates behind the phenomenon of pain, mythos teaches us how to meaningfully endure pain. Science teaches us how to cure a sickness, mythos teaches us how to meaningfully cope with loss and death. Or as Karen Armstrong explains:

“Logos (or ‘reason’) [is] the pragmatic mode of thought that enables people to function effectively in the world. . . .People have always needed logos to make an efficient weapon, organize their societies, or plan an expedition. Logos [is] . . .continually on the lookout for new ways of controlling the environment ... [and is] essential to the survival of our species. But logos has its limitations. Good at manipulating the world and making us powerful, it [does] not contribute to any broader understanding of the meaning of our lives – for that people turned to mythos.”

[*Karen Armstrong, The Case for God*](#)

We can gain exposure to the realm of mythos through great works of literature, be it those of Dostoevsky, Shakespeare, or Cervantes, but the great religions are the ultimate source of this wisdom. For the primary purpose of religion, from time immemorial, has been to help us cope with

our existential predicament and to find meaning in life, even if this purpose has at times been corrupted by religion in its organized and institutional forms.

“Not only Christianity with its symbols of salvation,” writes Jung “but all religions, including the primitive with their magical rituals are forms of psychotherapy which treat and heal the suffering of the soul, and the suffering of the body caused by the soul.”

Carl Jung, Practice of Psychotherapy

And in a speech given to a group of psychotherapists in the 1930s he further explains:

“It is not a play on words when I call religion a psychotherapeutic system. It is the most elaborate system, and there’s a great practical truth behind it.”

Carl Jung, The Symbolic Life

As an example of how one can put the mythos of religion to use, Jung explores the symbolic notion of the imitation of Christ.

“[Is not] Jesus a prototype of those who, trusting their inner experience, have gone their individual ways in defiance of the world?”

Carl Jung, Civilization in Transition

The imitation of Christ is the notion that Jesus’ life should be used as template for how to live. According to Saint Augustine, emulating Christ was the fundamental purpose in the life of a good Christian. But as Jung explains, the traditional interpretation of the imitation of Christ, as counselling that we strive to live as Christ did “. . .*has this disadvantage: in the long run we worship as a divine example a man who embodied the deepest meaning of life, and then, out of sheer imitation, we forget to make real our own deepest meaning—self-realization. . .*” (Carl Jung, *Alchemical Studies*)

Jung suggests that the imitation of Christ should be interpreted in a symbolic manner as the call to go our own way and to strive to develop ourselves as fully as is humanly possible. For Jung saw Christ as an example of someone who actualized himself completely and who was unafraid to follow his conscience even if it ended in his persecution. Christ, in other words, was an example of a heroic personality.

“The imitation of Christ might well be understood in a deeper sense. It could be taken as the duty to realize one’s deepest conviction with the same courage and the same self-sacrifice shown by Jesus.”

Carl Jung, Alchemical Studies

The imitation of Christ is but one example in the deep well of practical wisdom embedded in the great religions, and to profit from this wisdom we do not need to become a follower of an organized religion, nor must we pledge allegiance to any specific sect or creed. For as many organized religions are corrupted by power and degraded by politics, they can be barriers to accessing the authentic truths of religion. Fortunately, profiting from the truths of the great religions can be accomplished through a personal effort. Reading the texts, learning about the various rituals

embedded in the mythology and most importantly putting into practice what we learn can give rise to a religious outlook on life. Or as Karen Armstrong explains:

“The only way to assess the value and truth of any myth [is] to act upon it. The myth of the hero, for example, which takes the same form in nearly all cultural traditions ... showed us how to live more richly and intensely, how to cope with our mortality, and how creatively to endure the suffering that flesh is heir to. But if we failed to apply it to our situation, a myth would remain abstract and incredible.”

Karen Armstrong, The Case for God

For the truths of religion to impact our life, we do not need to fully understand their meaning. For myths, like dreams, are encoded in symbolic form and so they point in the direction of truths that are not fully comprehensible by the conscious intellect, but as Jung explains:

“We like to imagine that something which we do not understand does not help us in any way. But that is not always so. . . myths [have] a direct effect on the unconscious, no matter whether it is understood or not. The fact that its repeated telling has not long since become obsolete can, I believe, be explained by its usefulness.”

Carl Jung, Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious

In the modern world many of us have completely severed our connection to the realm of mythos and many of us view religion with derision and scorn. Some consider this as a sign of enlightenment and progress, but it may be a form of psychological regression. In a lecture delivered to Yale University in 1937, titled *Psychology and Religion*, Jung went as far as to call atheism the “urban neurosis” and in his decades of practice, treating hundreds of patients, he came to the conclusion that for some patients the only means of fixing what ailed them was the birth of a religious attitude to life.

“Among those in the second half of life” he wrote “- that is to say, over 35 – there has not been one whose problem in the last resort was not that of finding a religious outlook on life.”

Carl Jung, Psychology and Religion

If we continue to spurn religion we will not lose our need for meaning. We will merely look for meaning in other places. We will worship the state, a political party, or science – all of which are inadequate, and sometimes dangerous substitutes to the cultivation of an authentic religious outlook on life.

Perhaps, therefore, we need the mythos of religion to nourish our psyche and imbue our life with meaning and purpose. Perhaps without some form of a religious outlook man descends into the chaos of nihilism, totalitarianism, and hatred of self and society. And for those who think science has done away with our need for religion, Jung poses the following question:

“Can science be so sure that there is no such thing as a “religious instinct”?”

Carl Jung, The Development of Personality



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Why You Should Seek Power, Not Happiness – Nietzsche's Guide to Greatness

“...not increase of consciousness is the goal, but enhancement of power.”

Nietzsche, The Will to Power

In the quest to live a good life, each of us, consciously or implicitly, chooses an ultimate value around which to orient our life. For many this value is wealth, for others it may be status, social-acceptance, happiness, pleasure, love, knowledge, or comfort. In this video, drawing from the insights of the 19th century philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, we are going to argue that if we want to maximize our health and fulfillment, the value we should esteem the highest is power.

“What is good? All that heightens the feeling of power, the will to power, power itself in man. What is bad? All that proceeds from weakness...Not contentment, but more power.”

Nietzsche, The Will to Power

Many people associate the concept of power with the ability to control others and to put them in the service of their needs and desires. But this is not the type of power Nietzsche had in mind as for him the desire to control others is often the manifestation of an underlying weakness, or inferiority complex. Or as he writes:

“...the will of the weak to represent some form of superiority, their instinct for devious paths to tyranny over the healthy – where can this not be discovered, this will to power of the weakest!”

Nietzsche, On the Genealogy of Morality

Instead of power as the Machiavellian control of others, the type of power Nietzsche thought we should pursue is a power we embody, and express, within ourselves. A power, in other words, that is equivalent to what Nietzsche called “growth and expansion” (*Nietzsche, The Gay Science*), or to

what the contemporary philosopher John Richardson called “*the enhancement of a capacity or an activity already given.*” (*Nietzsche’s Values*)

As a few examples, an athlete who becomes stronger is increasing his power, as is the writer who improves her writing, the orator who sharpens his public speaking abilities, or the teacher who enhances her capacity to educate. And in the book *Nietzsche’s Values*, John Richardson elaborates on what for Nietzsche is the highest and purest form of power:

“Power is “more life” not by its mere continuation, nor by its multiplication, but by life’s being raised to a higher level of capacity and control;...Power is transition to a higher level...a “self-overcoming”... the point to my life is my growth or strengthening and [this] lies not merely in expanding but in ascending, which involves overcoming previous states of myself.”

John Richardson, Nietzsche’s Values

Embedded in Nietzsche’s writings is a guide for how to attain this power and the first step is to formulate a goal that fulfills 4 conditions. Firstly, the goal must be meaningful and challenging. Secondly, it must promote our health and well-being, or the well-being of others. Thirdly, it must be conducive to the attainment of personal excellence; and finally, it must be self-chosen, or in other words, an expression of our individuality and authentic aspirations. Or as Nietzsche wrote in an unpublished note:

“For what purpose humanity is there should not even concern us: why you are here, that you should ask yourself: and if you have no ready answer, then set for yourself goals, high and noble goals.”

Nietzsche, Unpublished Note

Once we have a goal that meets these 4 criteria, the next step in attaining power is to dedicate consistent time each day to its accomplishment. As we do, we will meet with obstacles and resistances. Self-doubt, fear, anxiety, and laziness will plague us. A lack of time or resources, the doubts and criticisms of others, or problems with our health or relationships will impede our progress.

In the context of pursuing power, the obstacles and resistances that stand between us and our goal present an opportunity. For when we confront a resistance, if we then stretch the limits of our mind and body in the quest to overcome it, we increase our power. Resistances are valuable for the seeker of power in the same way a skilled opponent, or enemy, is valuable for the ambitious warrior. For just as a warrior grows more skilled when he faces a worthy opponent, so too resistances function as catalysts that propel us to enhance our capacities and overcome our weaknesses. Or as Nietzsche puts it:

“The will to power can only express itself against resistances; it seeks what resists it... all expansion, incorporation, growth, is striving against something that resists...[a strong nature] needs resistance; hence it seeks resistance.”

Nietzsche, The Will to Power

If we engage in what Nietzsche called “*the game of resistance and victory*”, which consists of a “*hindrance that is overcome and immediately followed by another hindrance, that is again*

overcome”, we will increase our power and eventually attain the goal we have given ourselves. And then, the final step in Nietzsche’s guide to power is to put the goal, and whatever it is we have become, created, or achieved, behind us, and set our sights on the next, greater, goal.

“Whatever I create and however much I love it, soon I must oppose it and my love; thus my will wills it.”

Nietzsche, Thus Spoke Zarathustra

Or as the philosopher Bernard Reginster explains in more detail:

“He who wills power must not, strictly speaking, destroy what he has created, or hate what he loved. Rather, he must “overcome” what he loved or created. His will to power soon induces him to find any given creative achievement, any attained object of a determinate desire, no longer satisfying, no longer enough. The agent in pursuit of power does not seek achievements, so to speak, but achieving... What he needs are fresh, new, perhaps greater challenges. And this explains why the pursuit of power assumes the form of growth, or self overcoming.”

Bernard Reginster, The Affirmation of Life

In the Will to Power, Nietzsche explains that the pursuit of power is “*without final goal, unless the joy of circle is itself a goal.*” Here the circle represents the cycle of choosing a goal, confronting and overcoming resistances, increasing our power, attaining the goal, and then putting our creations and achievements behind us, and starting the cycle anew. In structuring our life around the pursuit of power there is no point in time, excluding death, at which we stop partaking in this cycle – this circle of power. Hence, such a life is without a final goal, unless, as Nietzsche explained, we consider the goal to be the joy, or the great happiness, that is a spontaneous byproduct of repeatedly increasing our power.

“What is happiness? The feeling that power increases – that a resistance is overcome.

Nietzsche, The Antichrist

“...joy is only a symptom of the feeling of attained power...one does not strive for joy...joy accompanies.”

Nietzsche, The Will to Power

Nietzsche’s ethics of power has profound implications for the worldview of modern man. For it offers a solution to the perennial problem of suffering. The problem of suffering is that we need a justification or meaning to our suffering, otherwise, we become prone to nihilism, world-weariness, and a festering hatred of life. Nietzsche frames this problem in the following passage:

“Man, the bravest of animals, and the one most accustomed to suffering, does not repudiate suffering as such; he desires it, he even seeks it out, provided he is shown a meaning for it, a purpose of suffering. The meaninglessness of suffering, not suffering itself, was the curse that lay over mankind so far.”

Nietzsche, On the Genealogy of Morality

Many religious, philosophical, and political systems throughout history have attempted to solve the problem of suffering by positing that this reality in which we suffer is but a transition to another, better, reality, a “true world”, in which suffering is kept to a minimum, or absent completely. Examples of true worlds include religious heavens, or social or political utopias that are said to exist on the historical horizon. Such worldviews attempt to give suffering a meaning by promoting the idea that so long as we endure our present suffering, at some point in the future we will find redemption in a reality devoid of it.

But the fatal flaw of these so-called solutions is that they devalue this earthly reality and the present moment, in favor of another reality or future moment, the existence of which we must take on faith.

“The concept ‘beyond’, ‘true world’ invented in order to devalue the only world there is—in order to retain no goal, no reason, no task for our earthly reality!”

Nietzsche, Ecce Homo

In contrast, Nietzsche’s ethics of power offers a down-to-earth solution to the problem of suffering. For if we take power to be the highest human value – the value that above all promotes individual flourishing – then we must also value the resistances that grant us the opportunity to increase our power. Suffering is defined by resistance; it is a feeling of pain or distress as a result of being hindered in some manner. Therefore, if we value power, we must also value suffering as it is an essential ingredient of power. Or as Nietzsche explains :

“...human beings do not seek pleasure and avoid displeasure. What human beings want...is an increase of power; driven by that will they seek resistance, they need something that opposes it – displeasure, as an obstacle to their will to power, is therefore a normal fact; human beings do not avoid it, they are rather in continual need of it.”

Nietzsche, The Will to Power

Nietzsche’s worldview does not require any leap of faith, nor does it encourage us to place our hopes for salvation in something outside of us – be it a god, science, a politician, or a political or religious ideology. It is a worldview which offers a convincing, and sober, solution to the problem of suffering. And it promotes a life of meaningful and productive action, thus functioning as an antidote to the passivity that has infected the zeitgeist of modern civilization. If, therefore, we choose to partake in the circle of power, or what amounts to the cycle of continual self-overcoming, we will facilitate the actualization of our potential and cultivate the “great happiness” and “great health” that is the prerogative of the seeker of power.

“Pleasure appears where there is the feeling of power. Happiness: in the triumphant consciousness of power and victory.”

Nietzsche, The Will to Power

Or as he wrote in Thus Spoke Zarathustra:

“And life itself confided the secret to me: behold, it said, I am that which must always overcome itself.”

Nietzsche, Thus Spoke Zarathustra



Will Civilization Collapse?

“I see in you all the characteristic stigma of decay. I can prove to you that... your atheism and your pessimism and your cynicism, your immorality, your broken-down marriages...were characteristic marks of the dying ages of ancient States.”

Oswald Spengler, The Decline of the West

Are we living in an age of civilizational collapse? In this video series we are going to examine what led past civilizations to fall, in order to determine whether ours is in danger.

“Wise men say...that whoever wishes to foresee the future must consult the past; for human events ever resemble those of preceding times.”

Niccolò Machiavelli, Political, Historical, and Literary Writings

In attempting to explain why civilizations collapse, historians and social scientists distinguish between external and internal causes. An external cause is a force or phenomenon that imposes itself on a civilization, overwhelming its capacity to cope. Examples include invasions from a foreign enemy and so-called acts of god, such as epidemics or natural disasters. Some historians claim Minoan civilization collapsed due to a volcanic eruption, while others propose that malaria played a major factor in the fall of Rome. Historians of Mesoamerican civilization allege that the famed city of Teotihuacan fell due to invasion by northern barbarians, while the role of Germanic barbarians in the collapse of the Roman Empire has been well documented and discussed.

As attractive as external cause theories are, they do not adequately explain why civilizations collapse. All great civilizations withstand natural disasters, persist through epidemics, and

successfully defend themselves from attack. It is only when they lose the strength, resilience, and adaptive capacities to deal with external crises that they decline and fall.

As external cause theories do not sufficiently explain why civilizations fall, we need to turn our attention to internal causes of collapse and investigate what causes a civilization to weaken – to rot from the inside out – and eventually reach a point where an external crisis becomes the proverbial straw that breaks its back.

“A great civilization is not conquered from without until it has destroyed itself from within.”

Will Durant, The Story of Philosophy

In the 20th century, Sir John Bagot Glubb, better known as Glubb Pasha, penned a little-known essay titled the Fate of Empires and the Search for Survival. In this essay he put forth the thesis that civilizations are akin to biological organisms in the sense that they have a natural lifespan, and they progress through a series of stages marked by growth, decline, and eventually death. By tracing the progression of these stages, we can gain greater clarity into how, and why, civilizations destroy themselves from within. Or as Glubb Pasha wrote:

“The experiences of the human race have been recorded...for some four thousand years. If we attempt to study such a period of time in as many civilizations as possible, we seem to discover the same patterns constantly repeated under widely differing conditions of climate, culture and religion...The life-expectation of a great civilization, it appears, commences with a violent, and usually unforeseen, outburst of energy, and ends in a lowering of moral standards, cynicism, pessimism and frivolity.”

John Bagot Glubb, The Fate of Empires and Search for Survival

According to Glubb, the first stage in a civilization’s lifespan is the Age of Pioneers. In this age a small yet determined population of innovators, warriors, and explorers, lay down the seeds of a new civilization.

“Men hack their way through jungles, climb mountains, or brave the Atlantic and the Pacific oceans in tiny cockle-shells...Poor, hardy, often half-starved and ill-clad, they abound in courage, energy and initiative, overcome every obstacle and always seem to be in control of the situation.”

John Bagot Glubb, The Fate of Empires and Search for Survival

After settling into their newly found, or conquered, territory, the pioneers construct small towns and settlements, harness the natural resources of the region, and start to focus their energies on manufacturing, production, and trade. The Age of Pioneers thus ends, and the Age of Commerce – the next stage in a civilization’s lifespan – begins.

In the Age of Commerce, larger city centers are constructed, public infrastructure is laid down, and with the vast amounts of wealth created from production and trade, the arts are lavishly funded and monuments, palaces, museums, world wonders, and other such cultural edifices are constructed. In this age a civilization reaches what Glubb called the “High Noon of prosperity” – its peak of wealth and glory.

In spite of the magnificence, in the High Noon of Prosperity the seeds of civilizational collapse are planted. For shortly after it reaches its peak, the civilization transitions into the Age of Affluence, and the immense wealth starts to corrupt the civilization. Selfishness, greed, and vanity uproot the virtues of dedication, sacrifice and duty, that were the norm in past ages. Rather than regarding money as a byproduct of hard work and virtuous action, people seek money for its own sake and see it as the be all and end all – the ticket to salvation. And so, the god of Mammon, symbolic of the morally debasing influence of wealth, makes his appearance on the historical scene.

“The first direction in which wealth injures the civilization is a moral one...The object of the young and the ambitious is no longer fame, honour or service, but cash...The Arab moralist, Ghazali (1058-1111), complains...[that students] no longer attend college to acquire learning and virtue, but to obtain those qualifications which will enable them to grow rich.”

John Bagot Glubb, The Fate of Empires and Search for Survival

What is more, in the Age of Affluence access to luxuries, pleasures, and comforts abound, and even commoners possess the wealth and leisure to indulge in them. “*A spoiled society begins to rot from within.*”, *William Ophuls explains*. In adapting themselves to abundance, the people grow incapable of enduring even mild forms of hardship and suffering, and as the often repeated saying goes, good times create weak men. “*Prosperity ripened the principle of decay.*”, Edward Gibbon explained in reference to Rome.

The civilizational decline that occurs in the Age of Affluence is further hastened by an increasing preoccupation with welfare. As there is no shortage of wealth, commoners and rulers alike call on the State to use its monopoly on force to take money from some citizens in order to provide medical care, education, housing, social insurance, and government handouts, to others. And as Ophuls writes:

“Affluence fosters a sense of entitlement, as well as a feeling that none should be left behind. The upshot is a welfare state with a burgeoning roster of clients and a growing burden of subsidies, along with a corresponding loss of personal responsibility and independence.”

William Ophuls, Immoderate Greatness

At the peak of Rome’s affluence, for example, between the rule of Emperor Augustus and Emperor Claudius, nearly one in three citizens were on the Roman dole and approximately 200 000 families received free wheat from the State. A mere generation or so later, Rome began its irreversible process of decline.

“It may perhaps be incorrect to picture the welfare state as the high-water mark of human attainment. It may merely prove to be one more regular milestone in the life-story of an ageing and decrepit empire.”

John Bagot Glubb, The Fate of Empires and Search for Survival

With the safety net of welfare, and with an abundance of wealth, the population no longer needs to devote the majority of its waking hours to securing the necessities of life. Many, therefore, turn their

attention to intellectual pursuits. The Age of Affluence gives way to the Age of Intellect, and the civilization continues its decline.

Few would deny the immense benefits that intellectual pursuits bestow on the individual and society at large, however, as with most things in life, there can be too much of a good thing. And one of the characteristics of the Age of Intellect is that an excessively one-sided rationalistic approach to life saturates the civilization. To paraphrase Nietzsche, in the Age of Intellect rationality is turned into a tyrant and reason is viewed as the only means of discovering the truth. As a result, the symbolic, moral, and often irrational truths embedded in myth and religion are discarded, and the civilization loses the pillars upon which it was built. Nietzsche, for example, implicated the extreme rationality exemplified by Plato and Socrates as a “*symptom of degeneration, a tool of the Greek dissolution.*” (*Nietzsche, Twilight of the Idols*), and as he continued:

“Without myth...every culture loses its healthy creative natural power.”

Nietzsche, The Birth of Tragedy

Or as the historians Will and Ariel Durant wrote:

“Even the skeptical historian develops a humble respect for religion, since he sees it functioning, and seemingly indispensable, in every land and age...The soul of a civilization is its religion, and it dies with its faith.”

Will and Ariel Durant, The Lessons of History

Along with the decline of religion and myth, the Age of Intellect is also characterized by the rise of highly rational and critical intellectuals, who thrive in dissecting and tearing down the dominant systems of beliefs and values. Referring to Rome’s Age of Intellect, the historian Edward Gibbon wrote:

“A crowd of critics, of compilers, of commentators, darkened the face of learning, and the decline of genius was soon followed by the corruption of taste.”

Edward Gibbon, Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire

As these critical theories spread, traditional moral codes give way to moral relativism, and the faith that life has meaning is replaced by existential nihilism. A majority of the people come to believe that there is no such thing as objective truth, that nothing is inherently moral or valuable, and that there is no meaning to the historical process, nor to life. And as William Ophuls writes:

“...thanks to the demolition job performed by the intellectuals, the society is increasingly “value free”—that is, it no longer believes in much of anything or takes anything seriously. The original élan, the moral core, and the guiding ideal of the civilization are now a distant memory.”

William Ophuls, Immoderate Greatness

Following this intellectual demolition job, the Age of Decadence – the terminal stage in a civilization’s lifespan – sets in. Without an overarching guiding ideal or moral core, there exists widespread disorientation, confusion, and moral decay. The masses live empty and meaningless lives from which they seek relief by drowning themselves in base pleasures, developing addictions,

and by adopting escapism as a way of life. People grow increasingly incapable of distinguishing between true and false, good and bad, right and wrong, and so they often choose what is life-denying and harmful. Beauty and genius are renounced in favor of banality, ugliness and vulgarity. Virtues are seen as vices, and vices virtues. The process of individuation and pursuit of greatness is abandoned in favor of an apathetic conformity. And as a result, mental illness becomes the norm.

“The society’s original vigor, virtue, and morale have been entirely effaced. Rotten to the core, the society awaits collapse, with only the date remaining to be determined.”

William Ophuls, Immoderate Greatness

Referring to the decadence that started to infect Rome in the 1st century AD, the Roman historian Livy explains:

“Rome was originally, when it was poor and small, a unique example of austere virtue; then it corrupted, it spoiled, it rotted itself by all the vices; so, little by little, we have been brought into the present condition in which we are able neither to endure the evils from which we suffer, nor the remedies we need to cure them.”

Livy, Characters and Events of Roman History

Glubb Pasha echoes the conclusion of many other historians by stating that there is no escape from the progressive stages of a civilization’s lifespan. Due to the laws of human nature, each generation will modify itself in predictable ways based on the conditions generated by previous generations. If this is the case, we are forced to consider what William Ophuls calls an “unpalatable” conclusion:

“...civilization is effectively hardwired for self-destruction.”

William Ophuls, Immoderate Greatness

Yet civilizations may be hardwired for self-destruction for another reason. For throughout history the ruling, or political classes – through a combination of mismanagement and corruption – have played a prominent role in the decline and fall of civilizations. And in the next video we will examine this idea in more detail.

“This is the tragedy of civilization: its very “greatness”—its panoply of wealth and power—turns against it and brings it down.”

William Ophuls, Immoderate Greatness



“If you want a picture of the future, imagine a boot stamping on a human face – forever.”

George Orwell, 1984

George Orwell’s writings have experienced a spike in popularity over the past several decades and for a good reason – modern societies are becoming ever more like the dystopia Orwell depicted in his novel 1984. Whether it be mass surveillance, the incessant use of propaganda, perpetual war, the manipulation of language, or the cult of personality surrounding political leaders, many consider Orwell’s novel to be prescient. While the West remains freer than the dystopian society of 1984, the trend of more and more power being concentrated in the hands of politicians and bureaucrats does not bode well for those who favour a free society. Orwell believed that the totalitarianism he portrayed in his novel was a distinct possibility for the West and at times he went as far as to suggest that it may in fact be inevitable. Or as he wrote:

“Almost certainly we are moving into an age of totalitarian dictatorships.”

George Orwell, Complete Works – Volume XII

In this video we will look at the cause of Orwell’s pessimism, focusing on two trends that increase the risk of a totalitarian future – the movement toward collectivism and the rise of hedonism. We then contrast Orwell’s views with those of another author of dystopian fiction – Aldous Huxley.

Collectivism is a doctrine, central to several ideologies, in which the goals of a certain collective, such as a state, a nation, a socio-economic class, an ethnic group, or a society, are given precedence over the goals of individuals. Socialism, communism, nationalism, and fascism are all collectivist ideologies. Orwell believed that a pre-condition for the rise of totalitarianism was the widespread

adoption of a collectivist mentality, and all the totalitarian nations of the 20th century were organized based on some form of collectivist ideology – in the Soviet Union and China it was communism, in Germany and in Italy, fascism.

Orwell's view of the connection between totalitarianism and collectivism has proved puzzling as Orwell was a staunch leftist, a critic of capitalism, and a socialist. How could someone who favoured socialism, a collectivist ideology, at the same time write a dystopian novel which portrays a collectivist society in such a horrific manner? To understand his position, it must first be realized that Orwell did not consider capitalism to be a viable system, or as he explains:

“It is not certain that Socialism is in all ways superior to capitalism but it is certain that, unlike capitalism, it can solve the problems of production and consumption.”

George Orwell, Complete Works – Volume XII

Capitalism was such an inadequate system in Orwell's mind, that like many other leftists of his day, he believed it was on its deathbed and would soon be replaced by some form of collectivism. He saw this as inevitable. The issue for Orwell was what type of collectivism would take its place.

“The real question...is whether capitalism, now obviously doomed, is to give way to oligarchy [totalitarianism] or to true democracy [democratic socialism]”.

George Orwell, Complete Works – Volume XVIII

Following the death of capitalism Orwell hoped that democratic socialism would rise in the West. Democratic socialists, like Orwell, advocated for a centrally planned economy, nationalization of all major industry, and a radical decrease in wealth inequality. They were also strong supporters of civil liberties such as freedom of speech and freedom of assembly, which they hoped could be maintained in a society which would largely deprive people of their economic freedoms.

The problem, however, which Orwell and other socialists had to grapple with, were the lack of examples, past or present, of any country successfully adopting democratic socialism. Furthermore, when a government rids a populace of its economic freedom, the destruction of civil liberties tends to follow. For a centrally planned economy is rife with corruption, waste, and mismanagement and so for a government to maintain power as it parasitically saps wealth and resources from a populace it must limit their ability to speak out and protest. To make matters worse, all the states that had turned to collectivism in the first half of the 20th century, such as Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia, adopted what Orwell called oligarchical collectivism, not democratic socialism.

Oligarchical collectivism is a totalitarian system in which an elite few, under the guise of a collectivist ideology, centralize power using force and deception. Once in power these oligarchs take away not only the economic freedoms of their citizens, a move which socialists like Orwell favoured, but also their civil liberties. Orwell was concerned that following the death of capitalism the possibility existed that the entire Western world would succumb to oligarchical collectivism. One of the main reasons for this fear was his recognition that hedonism was on the rise in the West, and a hedonistic populace, according to Orwell, is a populace ripe for the taking by totalitarians.

Hedonism is an ethical position which maintains that life's ultimate goal should be the maximization of pleasure and the minimization of pain and discomfort. In an increasingly urban and consumerist West, Orwell believed that many people were structuring their lives in a hedonistic

manner. A hedonistic lifestyle, according to Orwell, weakens people, it makes them feeble and incapable of mounting any resistance against those who desire to rule over a society with force. Or as David Ramsay Steele writes:

“Orwell thinks that any group which gives itself over to hedonism must ultimately become easy meat for fanatical ideological enemies, which are more self-sacrificing, more dedicated, and more remorseless. The real enemy is not the lover of pleasure but the fanatic who is against pleasure, and the former is conceived as defenceless in face of the latter.”

David Ramsay Steele, Orwell Your Orwell

The West, since Orwell's death in 1950, has become more hedonistic, and most people have been indoctrinated to accept collectivism in one form or another, but this has not led the permanent entrenchment of oligarchical collectivism. Rather, Aldous Huxley, the author of another famous 20th century dystopian novel, *Brave New World*, may have had a better grasp of the way Western societies would become enslaved in the late-20th and early-21st centuries.

Huxley, like Orwell, was an anti-hedonist, but his aversion to hedonism differed from Orwell's. Huxley's main concern was that hedonism could be used as an effective tool to oppress a society because people will willingly forgo freedom so long as their appetite for pleasure and consumption is fulfilled. If a society is structured so that people can devote much of their time to pursuing pleasures, gratifying material wants, and even drugging themselves to escape from reality, then persuasion and conditioning, rather than coercive force, will be sufficient to exert extreme control over a society. Under such conditions most people won't even notice the chains of servitude that slowly tighten around them, or as Huxley wrote:

“In Brave New World non-stop distractions of the most fascinating nature...are deliberately used...for the purpose of preventing people from paying too much attention to the realities of the social and political situation.”

Aldous Huxley, Brave New World Revisited

Neil Postman in his book *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, contrasts the differing fears of Orwell and Huxley:

“What Orwell feared were those who would ban books. What Huxley feared was that there would be no reason to ban a book, for there would be no one who wanted to read one...Orwell feared that the truth would be concealed from us. Huxley feared the truth would be drowned in a sea of irrelevance. Orwell feared we would become a captive culture. Huxley feared we would become a trivial culture...In 1984 people are controlled by inflicting pain. In Brave New World, they are controlled by inflicting pleasure. In short, Orwell feared that what we fear will ruin us. Huxley feared that what we desire will ruin us.” (Neil Postman)

Neil Postman, Amusing Ourselves to Death

The West, it seems, finds itself in a situation analogous to what Huxley feared. We live in a society that is drowning in distractions. Most people spend more time staring at screens than interacting with people in the flesh and blood, and popping prescriptions pills, or self-medicating with alcohol or illicit drugs, has become the normal mode for coping with any form of distress. Most people still

believe the West is free and the overt physical coercion that Orwell thought would be required to enslave a society has so far proven unnecessary. Through endless distractions, diversions, and the easy availability of pleasurable and distracting experiences, many embrace their lack of freedom and worship the society which has made their hedonistic lifestyle possible.

“The world’s stable now,’ says the Controller in Huxley’s *Brave New World*. ‘People are happy; they get what they want, and they never want what they can’t get.’”

Aldous Huxley, Brave New World

Before dismissing Orwell’s fears completely, however, it must be noted that Orwell was familiar with Huxley’s position, and he did not deny that the hedonistic society Huxley feared was a possibility. But he saw it as a temporary stage creating the ideal conditions for a more brutal regime to seize control and impose its will on a society composed of weak and apathetic men and women. Whether Orwell will be proven correct remains to be seen, but as was revealed in the first few years of this decade, if a societal crisis emerges, most people will accept the more brutal form of totalitarianism that Orwell feared. So perhaps all that is missing to throw us permanently into the dystopian world depicted in *1984* is one more major social crisis.



ACADEMY of IDEAS

FREE MINDS FOR A FREE SOCIETY



Spontaneous Recovery – The Body's Power to Heal from Cancer and Chronic Disease our Life

“Natural forces within us are the true healers of disease.”

Hippocrates

Modern medicine has achieved remarkable results. Its ability to save people from ailments which a mere generation ago would have led to an untimely death, borders on the miraculous. But when it comes to chronic illness modern medicine has its limits. Sometimes the treatment is worse than the disease. Sometimes the treatment only provides temporary relief from symptoms. Sometimes there is no treatment. Fortunately, modern medicine does not possess a monopoly on our ability to heal as the body possesses innate powers that can heal many chronic health issues. In this video we explore the body's natural capacity to heal and look the role self-transformation plays in promoting these healing abilities.

“...health and illness are not random states in a particular body or body part. They are, in fact, an expression of an entire life lived. . .”

Gabor Mate, The Myth of Normal

Our body is constantly at work healing itself. White blood cells clean out wounds and combat infections, fibroblast cells create new tissue to repair ruptures to our skin and flesh, new bone cells are created to fuse fractures, and the immune system can identify and neutralize all sorts of harmful pathogens. But the body can do more than just heal from wounds, infections, fractures, and viral and bacterial illnesses, it also has the ability to heal itself from virtually all forms of chronic disease as is evidenced by the phenomenon of spontaneous recovery.

A spontaneous recovery occurs when an individual is unexpectedly cured from a disease in a way that cannot be explained through the paradigm of modern medicine. Absent any intervention by doctors, without surgery or pharmaceutical drugs, some people heal from cancer, heart disease,

multiple sclerosis, Chron's disease, rheumatoid arthritis, and other forms of chronic illness. For example, with regards to cancer, it is well-established that tumors can shrink in size, or even disappear absent surgery, chemotherapy, or radiation, or as was written in the medical journal *Oncology Letters*:

“...malignant tumors as well as metastases, of almost all histological types, can regress spontaneously although certain histological types regress more frequently than others.”

Sante Basso Ricci & Ugo Cerchiari, Spontaneous regression of malignant tumors: Importance of the immune system and other factors

A spontaneous recovery does not necessarily occur suddenly, or without cause, rather as Caryle Hirshberg and Marc Barasch explain in their book *Remarkable Recovery*:

“The original meaning of the word “spontaneous” (derived from the Latin *sponte*, “of free will”), has little to do with the suddenness, rapidity, or immediate change without cause which contemporary usage implies. The word, the dictionary reveals, originally had more to do with something occurring due to a “native internal proneness,” a tendency to “act by its own impulse, energy or natural law.” It implies a natural process that arises from within.”

Caryle Hirshberg & Marc Barasch, Remarkable Recovery

While only a small fraction of individuals with a chronic disease will spontaneously recover, and while most spontaneous recoveries go unreported, there are still many cases of this phenomenon documented in the medical literature. For example, in *Mind Over Medicine* the physician Lissa Rankin points to a case of a man suffering from pancreatic cancer, one of the most devastating forms of this disease. This man was scheduled for surgery, but had a heart attack due to a presurgical procedure which forced delay of the surgery and as Rankin writes:

“Within four weeks of his heart attack, while he was recovering from the cardiac event, the symptoms and laboratory findings of his pancreatic cancer began to resolve. Four months after the initial diagnosis, a CT scan revealed that his tumor had disappeared completely – without surgery, chemotherapy, or any other cancer treatment. Four other case studies in the medical literature report “spontaneous” remissions from inoperable pancreatic cancers.”

Lissa Rankin, Mind Over Medicine

An article titled *Notes on Spontaneous Regression of Cancer* examines twelve cases of spontaneous remissions and tries to understand what life changes may have led to these recoveries. One of the most remarkable cases involved a patient with a grade four brain tumour:

“Dr. Maurice Green, as an intern, observed the treatment of a physician with glioblastoma multiform [grade 4 brain tumour]. The operation was unsuccessful. The patient, however, had a regression rather than progression of symptoms... Eventually he left the hospital completely well, indicating only that he felt differently about life after facing death”

Charles Weinstock, Notes on spontaneous regression of cancer. Journal of the American Society of Psychosomatic Dentistry & Medicine

Examples of spontaneous recoveries are not limited to cancer; they span the spectrum of chronic diseases, from cardiovascular and autoimmune diseases to neurological disorders, blood disorders, and skin conditions. There is even the mysterious Lazarus phenomenon which is the unassisted, or spontaneous recovery, from cardiac arrest after a patient has been declared dead and all attempts at resuscitation have ended.

If the body can bring itself back from the brink of death and cure itself from diseases believed to be terminal, then its capacity for healing is far greater than most of us realize. Our goal should be to harness this power to help us heal from chronic ailments or to prevent their onset. For even if we turn to conventional medicine to treat whatever ails us, when our body is optimized to heal the efficacy of such treatments will improve.

Research into spontaneous recovery has yet to unveil a universal formula or specific set of steps to unlock the body's vast healing potentials, as many factors influence this capacity, and individual needs vary. Those who have studied numerous cases of spontaneous recovery, however, suggest that there are recurring patterns and shared contributing factors that offer potential insights into how we can prime our body to heal.

On the one hand there are the physical factors that contribute to healing, these include changes to diet, regular exercise, improving the quality of sleep, and the breaking of addictions to drugs or alcohol. Factors related to the health of the body are crucially important to our ability to heal. But there is a psychological factor that stands above these in rank of importance, and this is the willingness to undergo a self-transformation.

Self-transformation is critical to the process of physical healing for two main reasons. Firstly, it is often only when we transform our sense of self that we develop the courage, discipline, and desire to change the physical habits that are thwarting our ability to heal. Secondly, self-transformation helps correct for the unhealthy patterns of thought, belief, and emotion, that through the body-mind connection, keep us locked in a state of sickness. Many of these thought and emotional patterns operate below the threshold of conscious awareness and are the product of our conditioning, be it an upbringing in an unhealthy environment or years of conforming to the sickness of modern society. If we free ourselves from this conditioning through self-transformation, we free ourselves from the damaging physiological responses that are dictated by our maladaptive thoughts, behaviours, and emotions.

The literature on spontaneous recovery supports the assertion that self-transformation facilitates healing, for example in the book *Cured* Jeffrey Rediger who examined hundreds of cases of spontaneous recoveries, writes:

“People who experienced spontaneous healings disrupted the default mode, got out of that rut, saw and experienced themselves in an entirely new way. . .”

Jeffrey Rediger, Cured

Or as Caryle Hirshberg and Marc Barasch write in *Remarkable Recovery*:

“. . . it has been noted by a number of researchers that extraordinary healing is often preceded by profound personal change, sometimes even what seems like a startlingly different personality.

Several researchers have noted sudden psychological turning points [or what are called] “existential shifts” preceding remarkable recovery. Dr. Marco DeVries and his associates found that a group of spontaneous remission cases they studied all showed a relatively sudden change toward increased autonomous behavior, and significantly altered attitudes toward illness, treatment, relationships, and spiritual beliefs.”

Caryle Hirshberg and Marc Barasch, Remarkable Recovery

In a paper titled “*Psychological Changes Preceding Spontaneous Remission of Cancer*” several researchers discovered that common among those who spontaneously healed from cancer was:

“...an increased dystonic reaction to limited aspects of the personality and an increased syntonic reaction to a wider set of characteristics than normally accessed.”

Schilder, J. N., de Vries, M. J., Goodkin, K., & Antoni, M. (2004). Psychological Changes Preceding Spontaneous Remission of Cancer. Clinical Case Studies

In layman’s terms this amounts to a rejection of the limiting aspects of one’s personality and an opening up to, and acceptance of, a greater sense of self.

As self-transformation can lead in many directions, some good and some bad, which form of it primes the body for healing? The etymology of the word heal offers a clue, as at root this word means a return to wholeness. A movement in the direction of psychological wholeness, which Carl Jung identified as the epitome of psychological health, is the form of self-transformation that promotes healing. Psychological wholeness is an ideal state which can only ever be approached, never fully attained, and it entails increased awareness of all aspects of who we are and integration of these aspects into our conscious sense of self. In volume 16 of his *Collected Works*, Carl Jung wrote that:

“...no previous age has ever needed wholeness so much. It is abundantly clear that this is the prime problem confronting the art of psychic healing in our day.”

Carl Jung, Collected Works Volume 16

Wholeness is attained through self-acceptance, coupled with self-knowledge, and expressed through acts of courage. Without self-acceptance we tend to deny and repress aspects of who we are, thus blocking their healthy expression. Without self-knowledge we never discover our true potential and what we value in life. Without courage we never express our potentials in the service of valued ends. Or as Mate wrote:

“When we heal, we are engaged in recovering our lost parts of self, not trying to change or “better” them. As the depth psychologist and wilderness guide Bill Plotkin told me, the core question is “not so much looking at what’s wrong, but where is the person’s wholeness not fully realized or lived out?””

Gabor Mate, The Myth of Normal

While self-transformation can enhance the healing capacities of the body, the fact remains that we are never in complete control of an illness, nor of matters of life and death. We can take all the steps necessary to heal and yet remain sick. But this does not invalidate the benefits of self-transformation as a response to illness or disease. For the pursuit of wholeness is an enriching and

meaningful experience that will help us endure life no matter the health of our body. In fact, many people only wake up to their more authentic self when faced with their mortality and so amidst the great suffering that accompanies disease, a silver lining can be found. An illness or disease may be the necessary spark that inspires us to discover who we truly are and which imbues us with the courage to live in a way more aligned with our authentic sense of self.

“It is only in the face of death that man’s self is born.”

Saint Augustine

Or as Martin Heidegger wrote:

“If I take death into my life, acknowledge it, and face it squarely, I will free myself from the anxiety of death and the pettiness of life – and only then will I be free to become myself.”

Martin Heidegger, Being and Time